

# Parent Handbook

for SPECIAL EDUCATION

# Introduction

## Parents

This handbook helps you navigate the special education process using facilitation skills and strategies. It is not a comprehensive set of special education rules and regulations.

Federal law talks about parents as partners in the special education process. However, sometimes even experienced parents feel like an outsider.

As parents, you play a unique role. You're the only one on your child's team who can provide their history, their uniqueness from a parent's viewpoint, and their skills and behaviors at home.

You're committed for the long haul. This makes you a key player on your child's team when developing the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

## Why Navigating Special Education Is Tricky

- Many laws and regulations govern the process — from federal, state and local district or charter levels.
- Emotions may be high. After all, this concerns your child and your child's future.
- The Child-Centered Special Education process requires preparation and meetings that can place demands on your time and energy as well as on the educators.
- Your child's needs for independence and self-advocacy must be balanced with required disability-related supports, accommodations and modifications.



## Our Goal: Help schools and families work together.

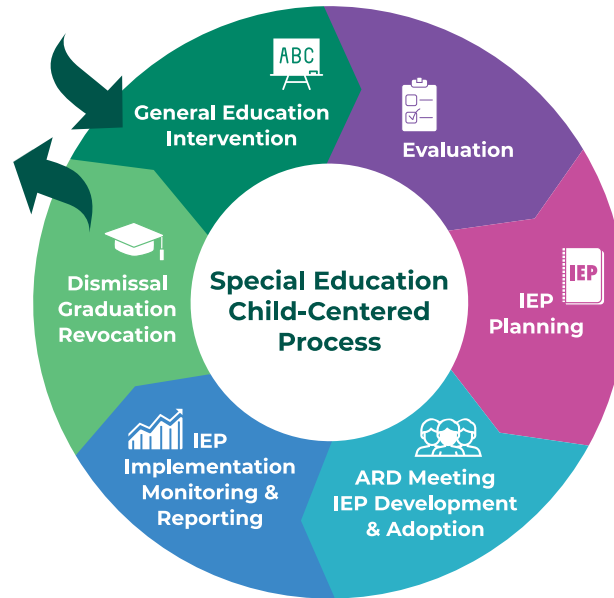
Better collaboration among the adults will improve your child's education.

### Acknowledgements:

Special Education/Academic Services  
Education Service Center Region 13

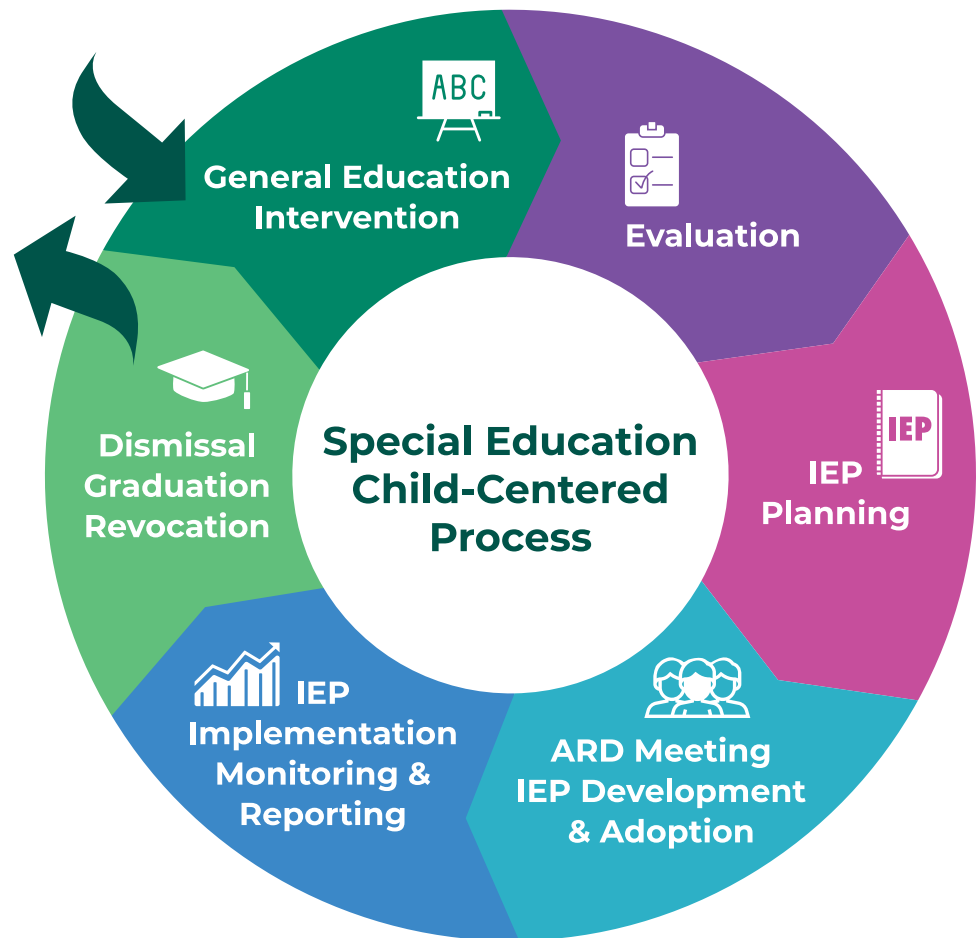
## How This Handbook is Organized

This handbook follows the Child-Centered Special Education Process — from general education intervention and referral to exit from special education services. The handbook is more about facilitation and collaboration and less about rules.

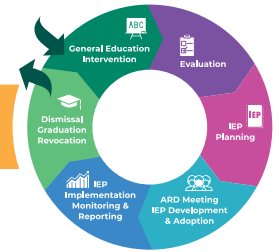


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# How Special Education Works



## HOW SPECIAL EDUCATION WORKS



### 123 BASICS

#### Overview of the ARD/IEP Process

Each student who receives special education services has an Individualized Education Program or IEP. The IEP Team or, in Texas, the Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) Committee, develops and adopts an IEP at least annually. Parents, the student when appropriate, school professionals and others when needed serve on the committee.

Each year, you and the ARD Committee, **evaluate, plan, develop, implement, monitor and re-evaluate** the IEP. The special education process repeats each year until your child exits special education services. Over time, the broad goal is for your child to close gaps in his performance related to grade-level standards and to work toward post-school goals and ultimately, independence.

Schools must ensure parents have an opportunity to participate in the planning, discussions and decisions. According to federal special education law, the term “parent” means:

- A biological or adoptive parent of the child
- A foster parent who meets certain criteria
- A guardian but not the state if the child is a ward of the state
- A person acting in place of a parent (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare)
- A surrogate parent when no parent can be identified or found after reasonable efforts, or the child is a ward of the state

#### What is Parent Participation?

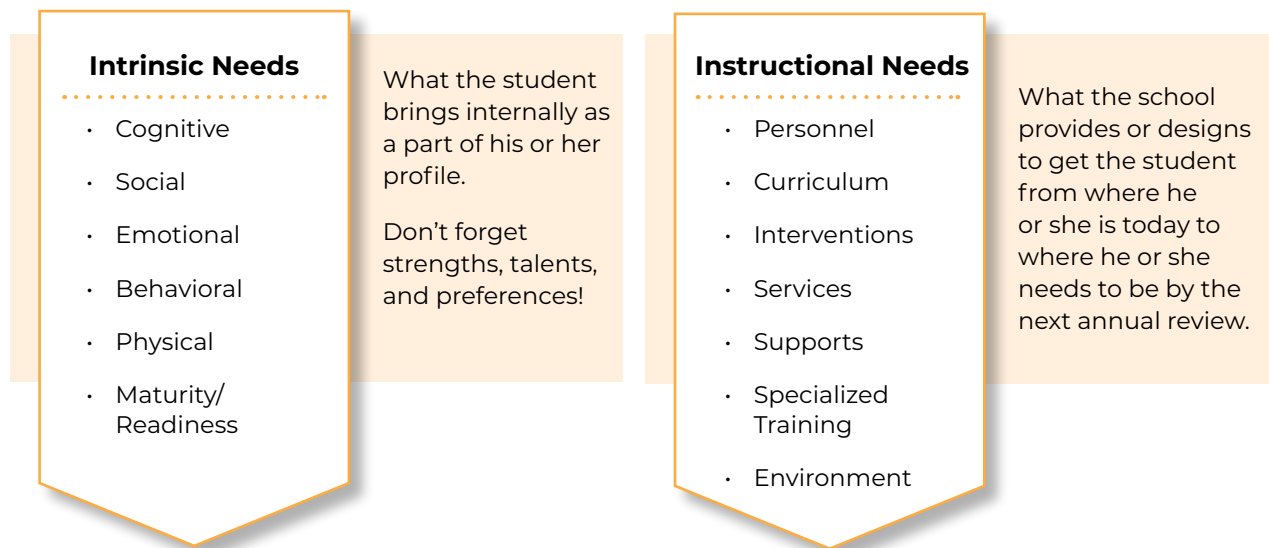
The law requires parents to have an opportunity to participate in the IEP Process. This means that, from referral to exit, you’re a valuable member of the team: actively participating in discussions, solutions, and decisions. Some of the ways schools involve parents include:

1. Seeking information and ideas from parents when setting up the meeting date/time and meeting agenda.
2. Considering parent information and ideas when developing the IEP. If your suggestions are not included, the committee explains why they are not accepting your idea and why they may be recommending an alternative.
3. Sharing drafts of the IEP and new evaluation reports prior to discussion at a meeting.
4. Making someone available to explain your rights as a parent of a child with a disability within the Child-Centered Special Education Process.

## 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 them. Your child's needs are intrinsic and instructional. Intrinsic needs are internal to your child, a part of their profile (e.g., sensory needs, emotional needs, academic needs, social needs). Instructional needs comprise those things needed in school because of your child's internal profile, such as adaptations to the curriculum, instruction, or the environment.



The ARD 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. The parent's primary role on the ARD committee is to advocate for their child's intrinsic needs. Educators take the lead in designing and implementing instruction.

### Data

Data drives the special education process. Educators and parents make choices based on fact and evidence-based practices, not fads or unsupported opinions. You and the team track your child's performance using a variety of assessment strategies and use that data to adjust the IEP. Every member of the team asks:

- What does the data tell us?
- Where is the evidence to support that?
- What other data would help us?

## TIPS

1. There is no comprehensive list of special education services and supports available to all students. Supports are 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. The team may choose or design something for your child 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 IEP team members and their contact information. Ask whether there is a particular day of the week your school schedules 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 give the reasons for your request.
2. Encourage your team to become familiar with interest-based problem solving.



**Ask questions to uncover underlying interests:**

*What makes that (position) important?  
What would that (position) get you that you need/want?  
What is most important to you?  
How would that (position) help?  
What would that (position) get you that you don't have now?  
What is appealing about that (position)?*

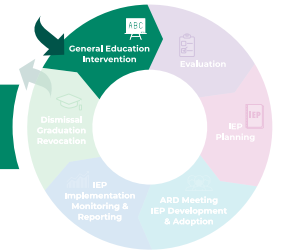
3. The agenda for an ARD Meeting follows a required sequence. Suggest your child's team use a written agenda, as a way of keeping the discussion on track.



## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS

Educators are advocating for you and your child, too. They want their students to be successful and for parents to feel supportive of the school.

# GENERAL EDUCATION INTERVENTION



## 123 BASICS

### Help Available to All Struggling Learners

Students may struggle in school for a variety of reasons. Many schools use multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) to assist them. MTSS is a framework that focuses on the “whole child.” MTSS supports academic growth and achievement as well as behavior, social and emotional needs, and absenteeism.

Multi-tiered supports are a huge part of MTSS. These tiers of support increase in intensity from one level to the next. For example, classroom performance may indicate your child needs small group instruction on targeted skills. With MTSS, they can “move up” to get the support they need in Tier 2.

**Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is an “umbrella” term that includes other multi-tiered systems of support you may know already.**

*Response to intervention (RtI)* focuses on academics and provides increasing levels of support to struggling students.

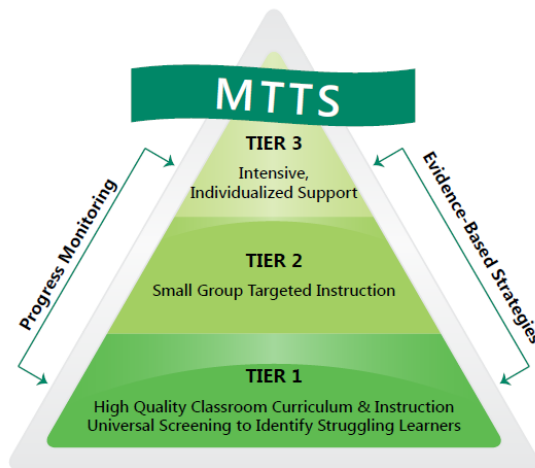
*Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS)* is similar to RtI but focuses on providing tiered supports to students who are struggling at school due to behavioral and social-emotional needs.

Tier 1 is classroom-wide support for all students. Teachers use evidence-based practices to instruct all students. Teachers monitor and assess student performance frequently to gauge growth in all academic areas.

Tier 2 is small group instruction on identified or targeted skills. Teaching may focus only on one area such as reading or math.

Tier 3 is intensive, individualized support. Break-out sessions may last longer and are more narrowly focused.

MTSS vary. The framework your school uses may have 4 Tiers instead of 3. Tiers 1-3 may all be general education supports or Tier 3 may be special education.



**MTSS is a proactive approach, not a particular curriculum or program.**

### MTSS and Special Education

The goal of MTSS is to screen all students early and to deliver evidence-based support quickly. It can also help schools and parents identify students who need special education.



**Q: I'm pretty sure my child has a learning disability. How long must my child receive MTSS or other general education intervention before we can consider special education?**

**A:** You may request an evaluation for special education services while your child is receiving general education interventions. Your child does not have to receive tiers of support before a referral for a special education evaluation can be made. Your child can continue to receive general education supports while the evaluation is being conducted. MTSS or other general education supports may not be used to delay or deny a request for a special education evaluation. You do not have to wait. Your child does not have to 'finish the tiers' before a referral.

**What is a 504 Plan?**

The term "504" is shorthand for Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which outlines requirements for public elementary and secondary education. The federal law protects the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education.

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.

504 plans are not part of special education so they don't provide individualized instruction like IEPs. They support students in accessing instruction and school activities.

School teams usually create written 504 plans. There are no set rules for what a 504 plan should look like or what it should include.

504 prohibits discrimination based on disability.

504 requires the needs of students with disabilities be met as adequately as the needs of non-disabled are met.

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

1. Student with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more **major life activities**.
2. Student having a record of such an impairment.
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 More Is Needed?

Sometimes a student continues to struggle despite interventions in the general education classroom or in spite of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and/or Section 504 supports.

Parents or the school may refer for a special education evaluation. With parent input and consent, the school evaluates the student to determine if they have a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

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

**A:** No. A referral is only to gain more information about your child as a learner and to determine whether special education is needed. Special educators must obtain your informed, written consent before beginning an assessment. Similarly, parents may request 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 written notice of refusal to test must be given to you 15 school days from receipt of your written request.

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

**A:** The school has 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 up to 30 calendar days to schedule the ARD meeting. The ARD committee determines eligibility under IDEA. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is adopted during the meeting. Services begin within 5 school days after the meeting, unless you waive your 5 days notice and agree for the IEP to start immediately.

### **Q: What if I change my mind and don't want testing?**

**A:** Consent for initial evaluation is voluntary, and you can revoke consent at any time before the testing is completed. However, if you revoke consent, it is not retroactive. If you refuse consent for testing, the school may want to talk with you about their reasons for testing and its importance for your child's education.

### **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 after 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).

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 **TIPS**

1. Ask for an estimate as to how long the evaluation and report writing will take. 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:

- Share previous or private evaluation results so tests are not repeated too soon or unnecessarily.
  - Sign a release of information so the school can obtain information from doctors and any private therapists.
  - Ask for clarification rather than leaving checklists or questionnaires blank.
  - Ask for testing dates to help prepare your child to do their best.
2. Expect the evaluation to consider:
    - Data from the general classroom
    - Parent and/or teacher checklists
    - MTSS or 504 interventions results
    - Teacher observations
    - Parent interviews/information
    - Any doctor or private provider reports

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 **COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES**

1. Provide open, honest information about your concerns or observations, or suggestions from other professionals familiar with your child. 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 happening. Students sometimes present differently in different environments. Either way, being open about potential problems or strengths will help the school understand your child more accurately. This will lead, in turn, to more precise planning on your child's behalf.
2. Listen with an attitude of curiosity and encourage other team members to do so too. Ask questions to understand. Be open to new ideas and ask your team members to do the same.

*“Listening is not a vocal competition in which the one who is catching his breath is called the listener.” — Anonymous*

3. Ask follow-up questions, whether in the moment or 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?”
- **Confirm your understanding of information**  
“You disagree with the ideas I’ve suggested. Is that correct?”
- **Invite elaboration**  
“You mentioned you’re working on 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?”



## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS

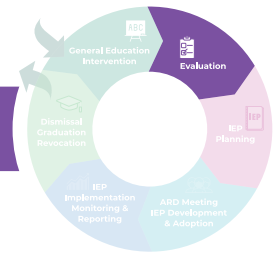
It takes time to complete a quality evaluation. Evaluation professionals often spend some time at first getting to know your child and building rapport before beginning the testing. If your child is already in school, the evaluator will work with the classroom teacher to choose testing times that minimize disruption in your child’s day. The testing often take hours to complete. Evaluators frequently break tests into smaller chunks and spread them out over a few days to help your child do his or her best.

After testing is complete, the evaluator scores and interprets the tests, and writes a report. The report summarizes results and makes recommendations about whether your child demonstrates a disability and what supports might help.

You can help the process by promptly completing and returning forms and by being sure your child is in school on the days the assessment is scheduled.

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. The timetable depends on many things, including the complexity 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.

# EVALUATION



## 123 BASICS

### Components of Every Evaluation

The initial evaluation answers three questions: (1) Does my child have a disability? (2) What are my child's strengths and weaknesses? (3) What specially-designed instruction and supports are needed? This information is the foundation upon which the IEP is built.

Evaluations often begin with a planning meeting or what is called a review of existing evaluation data (REED) meeting. These meetings are often held for initial evaluations and are required for re-evaluations. Your school evaluator will lead this planning meeting with you and the team. The purpose is to review previous evaluations (school and/or clinical), current classroom-based, local, or state assessments, as well as observations and information provided by the team members. The goal of the evaluation plan is to determine the initial scope of, and who might be involved in, the evaluation.



### Evaluations by Outside/Nonschool Professionals

If you have evaluation information from other professionals such as a doctor or therapist when your child is referred to special education, the school may 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 evaluation. 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.

### Notice and Consent for Evaluation

Your child's school will provide you with a Notice of Evaluation form, outlining the reasons for testing, areas to be tested, and the tests or evaluation instruments to be used. This helps you understand the information before testing. Then you will be asked to sign a Consent for Evaluation.

### 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/MTSS data
- Information from parents, teachers, and the student
- Report cards and other assessment data

## The Evaluation Team and the Parent's Role

The evaluation plan or referral concern(s) determines which and how many professionals test. Your child's evaluators might be 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.

As a parent, your job will be contributing important information about your child through interviews, checklists, or a family / medical history. 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:

- Use more than one measure or assessment.
- Be given in your child's native language or other mode of communication.
- Be technically sound assessment instruments.
- Select and administer tests so as not to be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis.
- Yield accurate information on what your child knows and can do academically, developmentally, functionally, unless it is not feasible to do so.
- Test in all areas of suspected disability.
- Ensure that if an assessment is administered to a child with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills, the assessment results accurately reflect the child's aptitude or achievement level or whatever other factors the test purports to measure, rather than reflecting the child's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills (unless those are the skills the test purports to measure).
- Be used for the purposes for which the measures are valid and reliable.
- Be sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of your child's special education and related service needs.
- Be administered by trained and knowledgeable evaluators.
- Provide relevant information to assist persons in determining the education needs.
- Be given in accordance with any instructions from the provider of the assessment.
- Differentiate between language proficiency and disability.

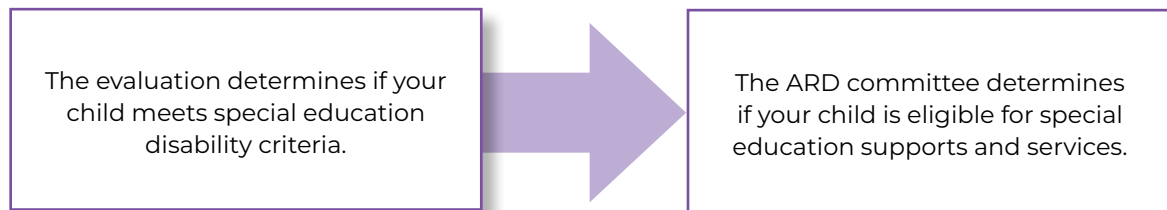
## The Evaluation Report

The professionals on your child's evaluation team will collaborate to create a written report. 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 demonstrates a disability under IDEA, 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 meeting to formally

review the new evaluation data. When possible, schedule a conference or phone call with the evaluator to review the report prior to the ARD meeting.

**Q: What if I think 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 including the selection criteria for the evaluator (e.g., credentials, ability to observe your child in school, reasonable financial limits). After receiving the IEE Report, the ARD Committee 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 its evaluation is appropriate.



**Eligibility for Special Education**

After the initial evaluation has been completed, the ARD committee will meet formally to decide whether your child is eligible 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 make progress in the general education curriculum.

- Auditory Impairment (AI)
- Orthopedic Impairment (OI)
- Autism (AU)
- Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
- Deaf/Blindness (DB)
- Speech Impairment (SI)
- Emotional Disturbance (ED)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Intellectual Disabilities (ID)
- Visual Impairment (VI)
- Multiple Disabilities (MD)
- Other Health Impaired (OHI): Includes medical conditions a doctor might diagnose such as Attention Deficit Disorders, Epilepsy, Diabetes, etc.
- For student ages 3-5: Noncategorical Early Childhood (NCEC)
  - NCEC: Autism, Emotional Disturbance, Intellectual Disability, Specific Learning Disability

**Q: My doctor has already diagnosed my child. Is this enough to be eligible for special education services?**

**A:** No. The disability categories recognized by 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 disability under the Individualized with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the impact on your child’s school progress. 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.

**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

**Q: What if my child is eligible for special education but I decide I don’t want services?**

**A:** Special education and related services require your informed, written consent for initial placement into special education. The consent for placement is different, and in addition, to the consent you signed for evaluation. If the ARD 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 Child-Centered Process

Evaluation is a repeating step in the special education process. Each evaluation must meet the requirements listed earlier in this chapter. Each evaluation report must identify a disability qualifying under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

### The Full Individual and Initial Evaluation (FIIE)

The first evaluation 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 committee to determine your child’s eligibility for services. The initial evaluation also sets the first baseline for goals 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 team including the parent conducts a Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED) to study existing records and data and decide whether additional evaluations are needed.

The committee may decide no new evaluation data is 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 or REED may recommend: 1) evaluation in all current areas; 2) updated evaluation only in specific areas; 3) testing in new areas; or 4) no new formal evaluation. If formal testing is not recommended, the school must notify parents in writing of their right to request testing even though the school did not determine it necessary.

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, at the “3-Year Reeval” time, the committee including you believes there is enough information available to determine your child’s current educational needs without formal testing. Eliminating repeated formal assessment is permissible under the law as long as you are notified you may request additional testing even if the school determines none needed. The team continues to assess your child’s progress throughout the year with grades, assignments, work samples, assessments, checking progress on IEP goals, and through communication and feedback from you.

## Other Situations When Evaluation Might Be Warranted

Evaluation is required at times outside the “3-Year Reeval:” (1) when your child is 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, the school or you may request evaluation when additional information may shed light on new or changed circumstances or needs. For example, your child’s behavior has become unpredictable and you need answers and way to help them. You and the team may decide a functional behavior assessment is needed to help develop a behavior plan.

Or, your child is now in 4th grade and struggling with writing. Writing had not previously been an area of concern, but now testing might be helpful in that specific academic area.

### TIPS

1. An “Initial” evaluation means that at the time of the evaluation the student is not in special education. It does not solely mean “the first time” a student is evaluated for special education. Think of this scenario: a student is tested for the first time for special education in kindergarten. This evaluation is called a Full Individual and Initial Evaluation. Then the student is dismissed from special education in third grade. If the student is referred again for a special education in fifth grade, this evaluation will also be called a Full Individual and Initial Evaluation because the student is not in special education at the time of the referral.
2. A private evaluation sometimes differs from a school-based evaluation. School evaluations focus on how your child’s disability affects progress in the general education curriculum and other 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. The true value of an evaluation is the description of how your child learns and how to help him or her. This leads to an IEP based on your child’s profile as a learner, not on typical teaching strategies for a certain eligibility category. Even within a specific eligibility category, each child has different strengths, needs and interests. Your child’s unique needs, not a label, determine the IEP.
4. Clarify, as needed, any information in the report you feel could be expressed more accurately. This is especially important in the social history section, where evaluators 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. But, schools usually require medical information to be presented on a specific form so information required by law is available to the team.

#### BEST PRACTICE:

Evaluation report given to you before meeting

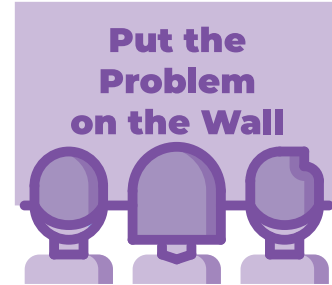
Evaluator reviews report with you by phone or in person before meeting

## COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

1. 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 a number of reasons, parents sometimes hesitate to report the depth of their concerns or feel reluctant to share certain types of information.
2. When in disagreement: Encourage your team to use joint problem-solving. It's soft on the people, hard on the problem.

Instead of attacking each other, you jointly attack the problem. Sit next to each other; face the problem; and work toward a mutually satisfactory agreement.

Listen with the intent to understand each other's interests—the concerns, needs, fears, and desire that underlie and motivate your opposing positions. (William Ury, *Getting Past No: Negotiating in Difficult Situations*)

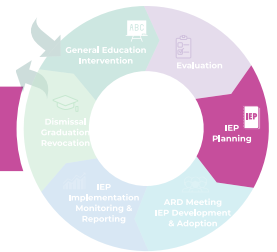


## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS

1. Withholding information can have the unintended consequence of creating a lack of trust on the school's part. While parents usually have reasons for withholding information, educators become frustrated when they perceive they are working with a student without complete information.
2. IEP team members want the best evaluation information available and must carefully consider an Independent Educational 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.
3. Arriving at the conclusion 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 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.

# INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)



## 123 BASICS

### What is the IEP?

Once your child is eligible for special education services, the ARD committee decides which services are needed and develops an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP describes the specific services and support your child needs. 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. Even experienced parents and educators can struggle with the details of the IEP. In Texas, the IEP is woven throughout a larger document, the ARD Committee Report.

#### The IEP answers two main questions:

- What does your child need to learn or do academically?
- What does your child need to learn to function in school? in life?

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

**A:** At the longest, 12 months. The IDEA states: *"The committee must review the IEP periodically, but not less frequently than annually, to determine whether the annual goals are being achieved."*

The IDEA further states: "The ARD Committee must revise the IEP as appropriate to address:"

- Lack of progress on goals and in the general curriculum
- Results of any reevaluation or new testing
- Information provided by the parent and/or the Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED)
- The child's anticipated needs
- Other matters (e.g., transition, behavior changes)

The ARD Committee must meet for the following actions (cannot use IEP Amendment process):

- Eligibility determination
- Change in placement (from less to more special education services, or more to less services)
- Manifestation determination when considering disciplinary actions such as removal to alternative education program or expulsion

#### Annual ARD

Committee annually reviews and develops ALL components of the IEP. Schools keep track of the annual 'due date' and hold the meeting on or before that deadline.

#### Review ARD

Committee meets within the 12-month period to review and/or revise less-than-the full IEP.

#### IEP Amendment

After the annual ARD meeting, parents and the school can agree to make certain changes to the IEP without a meeting.

## Basic Components of Every IEP

### Eligibility/Evaluation

The IEP contains a statement of the student's eligibility for special education (the category of your child's disability 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 and Individual Evaluation (FIE) and other data are the basis for recommendations throughout the ARD/IEP report.

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

PLAAFPs describe 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 goal meant to strengthen that particular academic or functional skill.

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 be more than grades or age levels or standard scores. They should not be subjective or written too general (e.g., the student is good/bad at something, "has difficulty," "is a pleasure").

The PLAAFP also describes how your child's disability impacts his or her progress in the general education curriculum.

#### **PLAAFP = 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 a starting place for instruction

### Annual Goals and Objectives

Annual goals and objectives are the heart of the IEP, as this is where 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 baseline PLAAFP) to where one would like to see it in a year. Goals may address many skills, such as functioning within a grade-level curriculum, engaging in socially appropriate play, developing independent living skills, self-advocating, managing emotions, and more. Objectives, or benchmarks, are smaller steps leading up to reaching an IEP goal. Objectives are required when students take an alternate assessment aligned to alternate achievement standards. They can also be included in any student's IEP to help monitor progress.

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

**A:** Yes. All students who receive special education services must have at least one measurable annual goal. The committee must develop the goals from an area of need described in your child’s PLAAFP.

Example: In 36 instructional weeks, given a 4th grade story prompt and 30 minutes to write, Sara will write a 3 paragraph essay using transition words in sentences and between paragraphs with 5 or fewer errors in usage.

**Annual Measurable Goal**

- The goal connects back to the critical needs identified in the present level of academic or functional performance (PLAAFP).
- The goal projects expected progress over the next 12 months, or less if short-term objectives or benchmarks are included.

**Components of a Standards-Based IEP**

TIMEFRAME	CONDITIONS	BEHAVIOR (Performance or Skill)	CRITERION
<p><b>Amount of Time:</b></p> <p>Number of weeks or completion date</p>	<p><b>Resources or Supports:</b></p> <p>With graphic organizer, physical prompts</p>	<p><b>Action that Can Be Measured:</b></p> <p>Point to, comprehends, writes, completes a task</p>	<p><b>Amount of Growth Expected:</b></p> <p>How much, how often, or what standard to demonstrate progress: <b>Speed, Latency, Accuracy, Frequency, Duration</b></p>

**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 schedule of services lists special education instructional services/support and related services your child receives. The schedule of services shows the start and end dates, frequency, and duration of a service as well as location (general or special education).

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

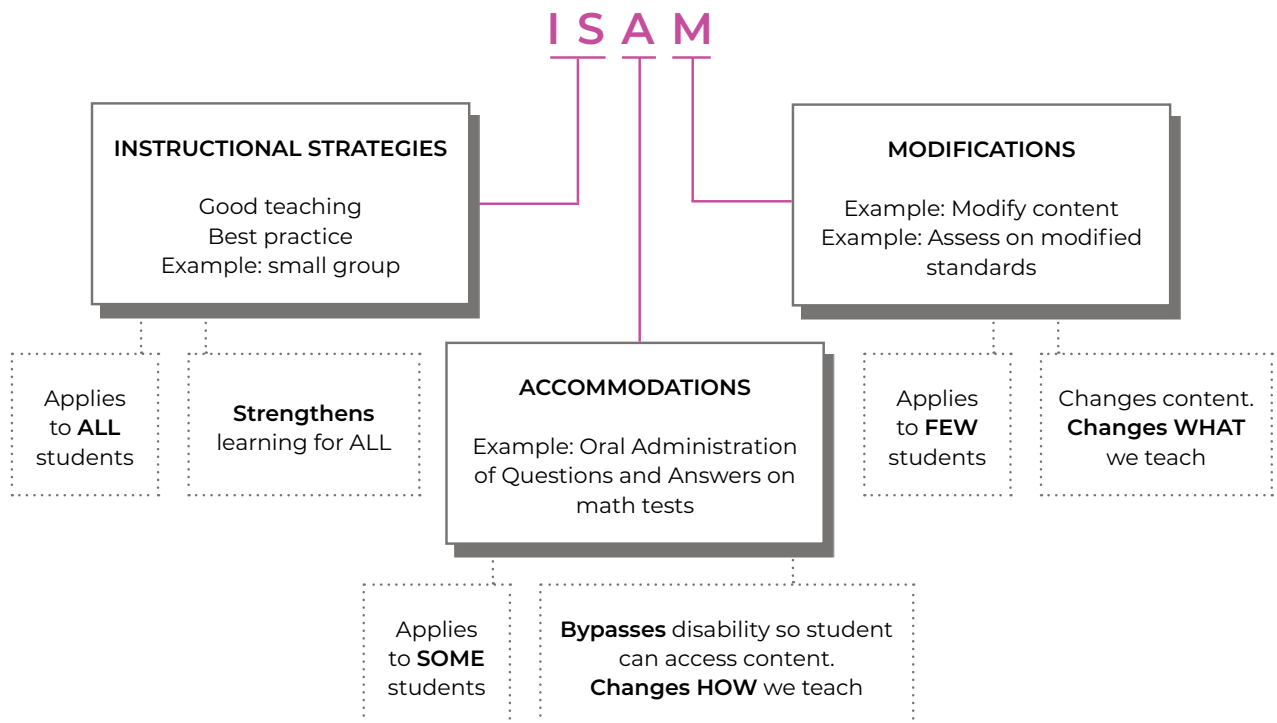
An **accommodation** is a tool that provides equal access to students. It is intended to remove barriers to learning or help the student work around the effects of his or her disability but does not reduce learning expectations. Accommodations often indicate *how* something is taught.

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.

Examples: 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 an 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, thus reducing the depth of content.

### How do I tell the difference between Instruction, Accommodations, and Modifications?



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

A statement is included in the ARD report about your child's placement in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). "Least restrictive" means to the extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled. To determine a student's LRE, the IEP team first looks at where the student accesses curriculum, the goals, and what supports are needed for progress. The ARD committee is required to consider general education with necessary supports first before justifying something more restrictive.

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 IEP describes which state assessment your child will take if his or her grade level has required subjects for testing as well as what accommodations or designated supports are needed to access the assessment. All students must participate in state assessment, but in some situations, the ARD 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 (PWN)**

After the ARD meeting, the school will give you a summary of proposals and decisions made in the meeting. 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 IEP may not be implemented for five school days after you receive the PWN. This is to ensure parents have time to understand and think about the decisions made in the ARD 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 meeting. The IEP will document the waiver of the five days if you agree to 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.

### **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.

Although formal documentation of transition planning is not required for students under age 14, it is never too early for parents and educators to think about and discuss the relationship between the student's current IEP and goals for life as an adult. 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 developmental, corrective and other supportive services a student needs to benefit from special education. Common related services include assistive technology, occupational therapy, counseling, physical therapy, and special transportation. Related services cannot stand alone as the only special education service provided.

### Q: Why do some children receive only speech therapy?

**A:** In Texas, speech services can be considered stand-alone special education instruction. In another state, you may have seen speech therapy listed as a related service.

### TIPS

1. Ask to “Pre-ARD.” This could be an informal planning meeting with teachers and/or therapists, phone calls, e-mail exchanges, or a combination of both. You and your team can generate ideas for services and supports as well as draft goals.
2. Consider the potential benefits and downsides of services that take your child away from the general education classroom. More services may mean your child spends less time with general education peers. Consider a variety of different ways and times for integrating services into your child’s program to strike the right balance.
3. A student may be placed in different environments throughout the day, depending on strengths and needs.

STUDENT NEEDS	ENVIRONMENT TO MEET NEEDS
Grade level in math	General Education class
Modified curriculum in English	General or Special Education class
Specially designed social skills training	Special Education class
Generalization and monitoring of social skills training	General Education classes

4. Services and placement are based on your child’s needs, as described in the IEP, and not on an eligibility 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.
5. Schools use different electronic documentation to generate ARD paperwork. The ARD may differ from one school to another if you move. Or if the school 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.

## COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

1. Make requests for instructional needs (such as specialized staff, curriculum, supplies, or equipment) in terms of your child's characteristics and not by name. This allows the team the flexibility to think creatively about how to craft a plan that is responsive to unique needs.  

If your child's team denies a request you are making, ask yourself whether you can reframe or restate 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 difficulties, but it also should include discussion of strengths and victories. 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. You may have one solution while others have different or contradictory solutions.

Remain open (and encourage the team) to first generate a variety, or menu of options. Resist the desire to judge or reject a suggestion (and encourage your teammates to do the same). Don't risk shutting down ideas when a mutually agreeable solution could be right around the corner.

Remaining open to multiple ways of addressing a need allows for more creativity and individualization in the planning process.

### **Brainstorm a Menu of Options**

- Generate options from a variety of viewpoints.
- Expand the menu; encourage wild ideas.
- Invent first; evaluate later.

## 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 IEP goals. It is important to balance your child's specialized needs without making the IEP so cumbersome the student has no time to participate in general group lessons, games, breaks, spontaneous "teachable moments," and other experiences that make up a typical school day.

The goal is to prioritize the content of your child's IEP so it allows access to the larger school curriculum and experience.

2. Don't get bogged down in the details when writing IEP goals and objectives. Do be sure the goals support your child's immediate needs and long-term goals. Do understand the function of each component of a goal (timeframe, conditions, desired behavior, and mastery criteria). If you do not understand why teachers have selected or eliminated a goal or component, ask about their reasoning.
3. Exercise caution when looking at generic sample IEP goals, as aspects of them may not fit your child individually.
4. 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.

This sometimes happens when a student needs to learn skills to strengthen future independence that are not a part of the 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 your child is 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 decisions, and the right answer may shift over time and across situations. Thoughtful, honest conversation with school professionals often reveals other team members feel the same conflict as parents do about how to achieve the right balance.

#### SAMPLE QUESTIONS

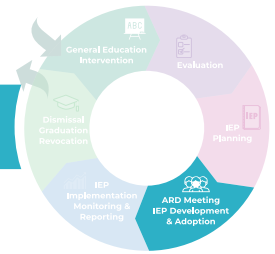
**What are we trying to accomplish?"**

**"What makes this goal preferable?"**

**"How is this condition more or less important than another?"**

**"What's important about this mastery criterion?"**

# ARD MEETING



## 123 BASICS

### What is an ARD meeting? How is it different from other meetings?

Special education services cannot begin until the IEP Team formally adopts the plan. In Texas, this team is referred to as the Admission, Review & Dismissal (ARD) Committee.

IEP team or ARD Committee meetings differ from other conferences and meetings you may have with educators. The meeting has a formality due to the required functions or actions set forth in law:

#### Required Actions

- Determine eligibility
- Develop/review IEP
- Adopt IEP
- Determine necessary services/supports
- Determine least restrictive environment

#### Required Members

- Parent
- Educators
- Persons knowledgeable about your child
- Your child when appropriate
- Others required by disability

#### Required Sequence of Discussion/Agenda

- Evaluation
- Eligibility
- Performance levels
- Strengths/Needs
- Goals
- Services
- Placement

#### Individualized Services and Supports

- Goals and, if appropriate, objectives
- Accommodations/Modifications for instruction and testing
- Related services necessary to support special education

#### Legally Binding

- Parental rights
- Dispute resolution
- IEP disagreement process
- Facilitated IEP meeting
- Formal complaints process
- Mediation
- Due-process hearing

### Q: What happens before the meeting?

**A:** A lot of good planning happens before the meeting. You have an opportunity to give input as the IEP is drafted. Look over the previous IEP and decide what's worked well; what has not. Look for where progress has been made; where not. Talk with teachers and your child about the accommodations—what's helpful; what's not. Decide if the proposed goals address the needs identified in the Present Levels statements. Offer suggestions from your viewpoint—what you've seen at home.

### 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 committee has formally met. In the ARD meeting, the team goes over the proposed plan's key features, continues working on unresolved issues, considers new or different information, and makes changes or creates new items. All required members of the ARD participate in the discussion but the parent and the school representative (usually the administrator) come to consensus to finalize and adopt the plan.

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

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

**During the Meeting**

**Who will be there?**

REQUIRED MEMBERS	AS NEEDED MEMBERS
Parent/Adult Student/Surrogate Parent	Related Services Providers (OT, PT, Assistive Technology, Counseling)
General Education Teacher who must, to the extent practicable, be an IEP Implementer	LPAC Representative for students with limited English proficiency
Special Education Teacher/Provider (Speech Therapists for students only receiving speech therapy)	CTE Representative for students being considered for or taking Career and Technology Education
School Representative	Teacher of Visual Impairment
Professional who can Interpret the Instructional Implications of evaluation results	Teacher of Auditory Impairment
Student, especially when discussing transition services and postsecondary goals	Agency Representatives likely responsible for transition services

Students usually have more than one teacher, especially once they reach the secondary level. Schools often use a **case manager**. The case manager, or point person, coordinates different classes and supports and 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, the case manager will gather input or reports to consider during the pre-ARD process and to present at the ARD meeting.

**Q: Should my child attend?**

**A:** Whenever appropriate, yes. Your child’s age, developmental level, and individual needs dictate the answer to this question. Ideally, as students grow older, parents and school encourage them 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. Your child can learn to describe his or her strengths and needs, strategies and accommodations that work, and goals and interests. Help your child practice self-advocating for needed supports. 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 meetings.

### **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. 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 meeting in your absence. In this event, you still will receive a copy of the ARD/IEP for your review.

## **What the Meeting Covers**

Special Education law dictates the sequence and topics to be addressed in ARD meetings. Many schools work with you before the meeting to streamline the meeting if possible. However, in situations where more time is needed to cover the agenda, schools schedule more time. Work with your child's teacher or case manager to clarify the agenda and time set aside for the meeting.

### **BASIC AGENDA**

- Introductions / Team Members Roles
- Purpose / Meeting Outcomes
- Eligibility / Present Levels of Performance
- Annual Goals / Objectives If Required
- Supports / Services / Accommodations / Modifications / Assessment
- Other Required Considerations / LRE Considerations / Placement
- Consensus

## **Concluding the Meeting**

### **Reaching Consensus: How Can I Check "Agree" If I'm Not 100% Sure?**

As the last step, parents and the school representative indicate whether they have reached agreement about the school's proposed IEP.

This mutual agreement is called consensus. Consensus is not always 100% agreement, and it is not voting 'yes' or 'no.' Instead, agreement by consensus is reached when you can support the plan, even though you have varying degrees of enthusiasm.

'Agreeing with reservations' does not eliminate your right to continue raising concerns. The team can implement the supports about which you feel confident, while simultaneously working on unresolved items. Just because you allow a less desirable part of the plan to be implemented does not mean you must wait a year to revisit the issue. At times, IEP teams agree to move forward during a trial period.

If you formally disagree with elements of the IEP, this triggers a number of procedures designed to allow for new information to be gathered and another ARD meeting to be scheduled. Your child's old plan remains in place during the interim.

### **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 how they handle a request for more time. Schools usually have guidelines about how this type of request will be handled. Also, you may agree with the IEP but want the five-day wait period before the services start to think about the recommendations. 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. Changes must be made by holding another ARD meeting or through an IEP Amendment.

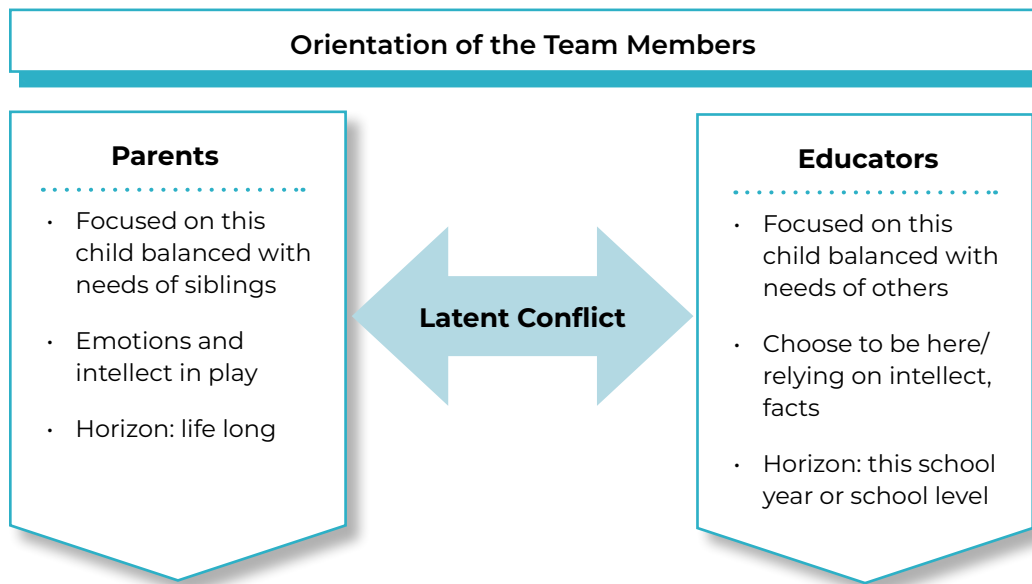


## TIPS

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, ask your child teacher or case manager.
2. Share what you see your child doing at home or when completing homework.
3. Help the team 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, try using a trial period to collect data and a set check-in date.
6. Don't surprise your team with brand-new issues. The school wants to act on information you contribute, and in some instances may not be able to complete the meeting or implement new plans for your child, without time to prepare.
7. If you want to record an ARD 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. If you plan to invite an attorney, inform the team as the school may wish to invite legal counsel as well. Giving notice prevents a meeting from being canceled or rescheduled.

## COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

1. **Understand conflict 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 improves decision making or becomes a fight. While all team members have your child's best interest at heart, parents and educators naturally come from different contexts. This natural mismatch in perspective lays the groundwork for **latent conflict**, or unstable peace.



The presence of latent conflict means 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.**  
 Facilitation is a term used for a set of principles, skills and practices aimed at helping teams improve their work. Effective facilitation improves all types of meetings and, more recently, is being used in ARD meetings.  
 Facilitation means to “make easier”— to make the process easier for educators and parents.



### Facilitation Can Improve Meeting Processes

Meeting Management Communication	Problem Identification Problem Solving	Discussion Decision-Making
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### Typical Facilitation Skills and Techniques

PROCESS/PROCEDURES	INTERACTION/ COMMUNICATION	QUALITY OUTCOMES
Pre-Meeting Planning	Listening to Understand	Student-Centered IEP
Agenda Visible to All	Purposeful Questioning	Data-Based IEP
Discussion Guidelines	Interests-Based Problem Solving	Commitments Monitored
Facilitated Discussions	Consensus Building	Commitments Met
Decision-Making Tools	Consensus Language	Progress Monitored & Reported

### Types of Facilitators

A facilitator is a team member trained in facilitation skills and processes who intervenes in the meeting to increase the group's effectiveness.

A more neutral or independent facilitator may be used when discussions have become intense; emotions are high; the team seems stuck; or there are strongly held positions that lead to disagreement.

### Facilitation Continuum

School-Based	School-Based, Not Team Member	District-Based, Not Team Member	Outside District, 3rd Party
All Team Members Trained in Facilitation	Trained Staff Members from Another Campus as Facilitator	Trained Center Office Person as Facilitator	Trained Independent Contractor as Facilitator

Informal, Routine Practice → More Formal Practice  
 Resolved at Lowest Level → Resolved without Legal Intervention

**3. Focus on clear communication.**

Make sure you are clear on what others are saying. Ask questions to gain the information you need or to clarify school information. Repeat and restate comments, and ask team members if 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).

Example:

*"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. Make opportunities for relationship building.**

Nurture relationships with your team members by genuinely acknowledging their efforts and professionalism. A trusting relationship will help the team tackle a difficult stage, conversation, or topic.

**Trusting Relationships:**

- Trust can be created and destroyed.
- We can decide to trust.
- Though difficult, lost trust can be restored.

**How:**

- Talk straight. Demonstrate integrity.
- Keep commitments. Follow through. Follow up.
- Listen before you speak. Listen to understand.
- Right wrongs; make restitution when possible.
- Be open and authentic. No hidden agendas.

— Stephen M. R. Covey, *The Speed of Trust*

**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 service providers work on more than one campus. Each member of your child's 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 meeting's unique features, this is not the meeting for a lot of extraneous information. Bear in mind (1) the ARD meeting has to accomplish a set agenda, (2) find common time for your instructional team to be away from students, and (3) the ARD 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 Talks chart is not meant to convey a non-child-centered attitude or lack of caring for your child.

<p><b>Ground Rules</b></p> <p>.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start on time; end on time</li> <li>• Turn cell phone to silent</li> <li>• Come prepared</li> <li>• Participate fully</li> </ul>	<p><b>Discussion Guidelines</b></p> <p>.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen and then be heard</li> <li>• Ask questions to clarify</li> <li>• Work to resolve differences</li> <li>• Value others' ideas</li> </ul>	<p><b>Future Talks or Parking Lot</b></p> <p>.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-ARD concerns</li> <li>• Teacher conference topics (e.g., homework routines)</li> <li>• Administrator conference topic (e.g., teacher request)</li> </ul>
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4. Be open to the team using thinking tools to improve discussions and problem solving.

<p><b>Pictures</b></p> <p><b>Graphs (bar, line, circle, etc.)</b></p> <p><b>Metaphors</b></p> <p><b>Connections and themes</b></p>	<p><b>Linkages</b></p> <p><b>Bulleted Lists</b></p> <p><b>Mind mapping</b></p> <p><b>Stories and quotes</b></p>
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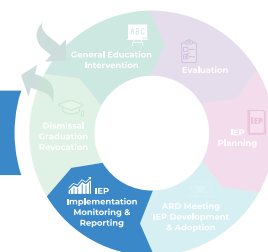
**Examples:**

“If this group were a garden, how would you describe our work?”

“We seem to be missing a piece to the puzzle we are assembling.”

<b>Decision Grid</b>		
Training	Time	Meet Goals
A		
B		
C		
D		

## IEP IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING, AND REPORTING



### 123 BASICS

At this point, the plan 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 success.

### Monitoring Your Child's Progress

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

In addition to general report cards all students receive, you receive IEP progress reports 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 on the 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.

#### **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 sense of what your child is doing in school by attending parent-teacher events, looking at assignments and work coming 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. And, of course, you can contact your child's teacher(s) and discuss your child's progress in meeting goals.

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

**A:** Special educators collect data to measure how your 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. The team could increase the difficulty or rigor, move on to next steps in a sequence, or add goals to the IEP.

If your child's progress isn't proceeding as expected, the team should discuss whether different, or additional, strategies and supports might be appropriate.

If progress isn't as you expect...		
Find Out What the IEP Implementation Looks Like:	Check on Accommodations, Modifications, and Goals:	Consider Evaluation (Formal or Informal)
<p>Ask to see how teachers document the provision of IEP services (e.g., in-class support).</p> <p>Ask to see examples of modified tests, graphic organizers, and other accommodations.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Ask whether accommodations are working and whether some need to be deleted or added at the next meeting.</p> <p>Talk with teachers about how they are modifying the curriculum.</p> <p>Talk with teachers about how IEP goals addressing skill deficits are provided. Who is working on the goal? When?</p> <p>Ask for evidence the IEP has been implemented.</p>	<p>Consider any new behaviors. Inform teachers of changes at home impacting performance or behavior.</p> <p>Ask whether a Functional Behavior Assessment and/or Behavior Intervention Plan might help.</p> <p>Consider testing. Talk with teachers or evaluation specialist about whether new evaluation data might be informative.</p>

### 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 from the teachers and other staff. Saying progress is "being made" or "continuing" is not enough.
2. If you believe your child has mastered or is approaching mastery of the 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's being measured. The teacher may be waiting for a higher frequency of success on assignments,

responses in classes, or assessment. Or team members are measuring success by completion of more steps than you observed at home. The reverse can happen as well, where your school team reports 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 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 tracks your child's performance, and at the six-week mark, the group reconvenes to discuss how things went. The data coming from a trial period might give the team the additional information needed to continue without the accommodation.

4. Homework can serve as a progress monitoring tool. You can observe how your child interacts with it:

- Is it too easy or too difficult?
- Is there a struggle with one concept, skill or type of task?
- Is your child able to complete it in the expected amount of time?
- Is homework a battle? If yes, why? How improve?

The answers to these questions can reveal a lot about your child's instructional level, organizational skills, and emotional maturity. Give feedback to teachers if homework issues seem unusual. Use homework as a communication tool between home and school.

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## COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

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

Open-ended questions encourage discussions:

- "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?"
- "How would you compare my child's skill in \_\_\_\_\_ as compared to earlier in the year?"

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 or other central office administrator).

## **Home-School Communication**

Between ARD meetings or planning sessions, 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. Teachers use different communication systems, ranging from a daily notebook to an occasional e-mail, phone call or class website.

Most teachers balance three communication priorities:

- (a) Helping important information get home so parents are informed,
- (b) Encouraging students to learn to manage their own communication needs as growing self-advocates, and
- (c) Attending to the communication needs of all students and families.

### **2. Ways to make communication easier**

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.

You can make it easier for your teacher to respond by:

- (a) Trying to accommodate her or his conference time for meetings or phone calls
- (b) When possible (sometimes it's not), try to e-mail ahead so as to not require a response immediately and
- (c) Call ahead to schedule longer meetings.

**3. Email may be the most common method of parent-teacher communication, and it has clear advantages. However, emails do have pitfalls:**

- (a) Lengthy emails get skipped or put aside to read later when more time is available.
- (b) Frequent or repeat emails get set aside to be handled together.
- (c) More seriously, email may mis-communicate feelings and content.

**Suggestions for Improving Emails and Communication**

- Be concise. It's better to put as much information into as few words as possible.
- Have a purpose. Everything in the email should align with the purpose.
- Start with a summary of critical information to date.
- Organize your thoughts. Keep all relevant subject matter to its section.
- Clearly state or list requests and actions as needed.

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## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS

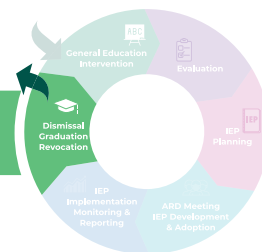
1. Barring unusual circumstances, once your child's program is in place, it is important to allow time for observable data to emerge. How long to let something play out varies greatly with the situation. For example:
  - Questioning a technique designed to help with test taking may be premature after three weeks if only one test has been given in that time period.
  - 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, think about whether enough time has passed to be able to reach a conclusion.

2. Managing the boundaries between partnering with professionals and overstepping can be tricky. Teachers value when parents share connections to outside providers, past successes, and samples of things that work at home or in other environments. However, parents should recognize that schools have the responsibility and need to protect the instructional day as well as the rights of all students. Suggestions:
  - Think carefully before requesting lengthy or frequent observation time for yourself or your child's outside professionals.
  - Refrain from providing materials intended to take the place of instruction at school.
  - Resist the temptation to drop in just to "hang out" for extended periods of time.



## DISMISSAL, GRADUATION AND REVOCATION



### 123 BASICS

Because special education is designed individually for each child, the length of time your child receives services is also based on his or her unique needs. At each ARD meeting, the team reconsiders whether the student is a “child with a disability” as defined by IDEA and as a result of the disability, the child continues to need special education and related services.

This means, 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/related services.

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.
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 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 their performance and grade-level standards.

If your child is successfully accessing the general curriculum with less and less special education support, dismissal may be an option. Your team will convene an ARD meeting with the purpose of considering dismissal from special education.

Because your child may still have a disability, but no longer need specially designed instruction, he or she may be eligible for general education interventions or supports, such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) or 504 supports and accommodations.

#### Q: What if my child falls apart after dismissal?

**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, you or staff can refer your child back to special education. If the time between dismissal and a new referral is short, your child’s original eligibility or evaluation information may be used, thus avoiding the need to start from scratch and go through the entire evaluation process.

## Graduation

All students are eligible to earn a diploma after completing graduation requirements. These requirements include credits and assessments.

*Credits* can be earned by taking classes and/or showing mastery of the curriculum.

*Assessments* must be completed through End of Course exams, called EOCs.

Texas offers a number of different pathways to graduate, depending on student goals and career interests, but the basic requirements of credits and assessments apply to all. Each high school offers a variety of classes aligned to these pathways. Your child's ARD committee can make decisions about supports such as accommodations or modifications in their classes, and whether your child is eligible to take an alternate assessment. Your child's ARD committee can also determine if she or he will be required to pass the assessment in order to graduate.

## 18+ Services

Most students with disabilities complete their graduation requirements in 4 years and are no longer eligible for special education beyond high school. However, if your child received modified curriculum in any classes for graduation credit, he or she may be eligible for continued special education services after completing credits and assessments. 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, which the student has already completed, these services focus on the domains of adult life: employment, lifelong learning, community access, and independent living.

The ARD/IEP process is the same for students receiving 18+ services as it is during the K-12 years; however the emphasis of 18+ programming is on preparing students and their families to put the adult schedule in place, with supports that will be sustainable after the student leaves the school setting. While a student may be eligible for services through age 22, it can be helpful to exit before eligibility ends to be sure their schedule and supports are working. Students who are eligible to continue for services beyond meeting graduation requirements are also eligible to return for services after receiving a diploma and exiting.

**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 classmates?**

**A:** Yes and No, students continuing to receive special education services after completing course requirements or 4 years in high school do not officially graduate with their class, but they may participate in graduation activities and ceremonies with their class. They will receive a certificate of attendance instead of a diploma at the graduation ceremony. These students will really graduate and receive their diplomas when IEP requirements have been completed.

## Q: What is transition planning?

**A:** Transition planning is planning for the student's next steps after high school as part of the ARD process. Taking into account the student's strengths, interests, preferences, and needs, transition planning helps the student and parents develop postsecondary goals for education beyond high school, employment, and independent living. Your child's postsecondary 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.

## 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.

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 your revocation of consent for services will remove any special program design and will hold your child accountable for all requirements 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 your child is ready to navigate school without special education instruction, accommodations, 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 is needed to make progress in school.
7. 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 in all areas 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 career assessments and interest inventories to help develop an IEP with quality goals and activities for transition planning.
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. Put your request in writing.
4. Expect to receive a written explanation or notice of the consequences of a revocation of consent for special education.

## **BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS**

### **Dismissal**

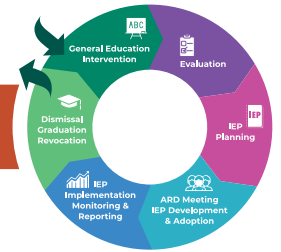
Parents sometimes worry about ulterior motives for dismissal on the school's part. Some parents express concerns about higher-needs students taking up special education resources, internal quotas or caps for the number of special education students, or staffing concerns as a reason to thin student numbers. 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 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.



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 with our understanding of disability, equal opportunity, and best practices in education. Today, special education is governed by the Individuals with Disabilities 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.

IDEA provides for many parent and student rights, including the right to lodge complaints and to file lawsuits with state education agencies and in court. Sometimes the dispute resolution mechanisms found in IDEA, including litigation, provide the only way to resolve special education disagreements.

**Pitfalls of Special Education’s Legal Model**

Litigation (or threatened litigation) is expensive and time intensive. Central office administrators, attorneys, and advocates, who are not involved in the day-to-day activities of the school, may come in to speak for the school or families. Decisions are made by education agency staff members, hearing officers, and judges who are even farther removed from the school and the child.

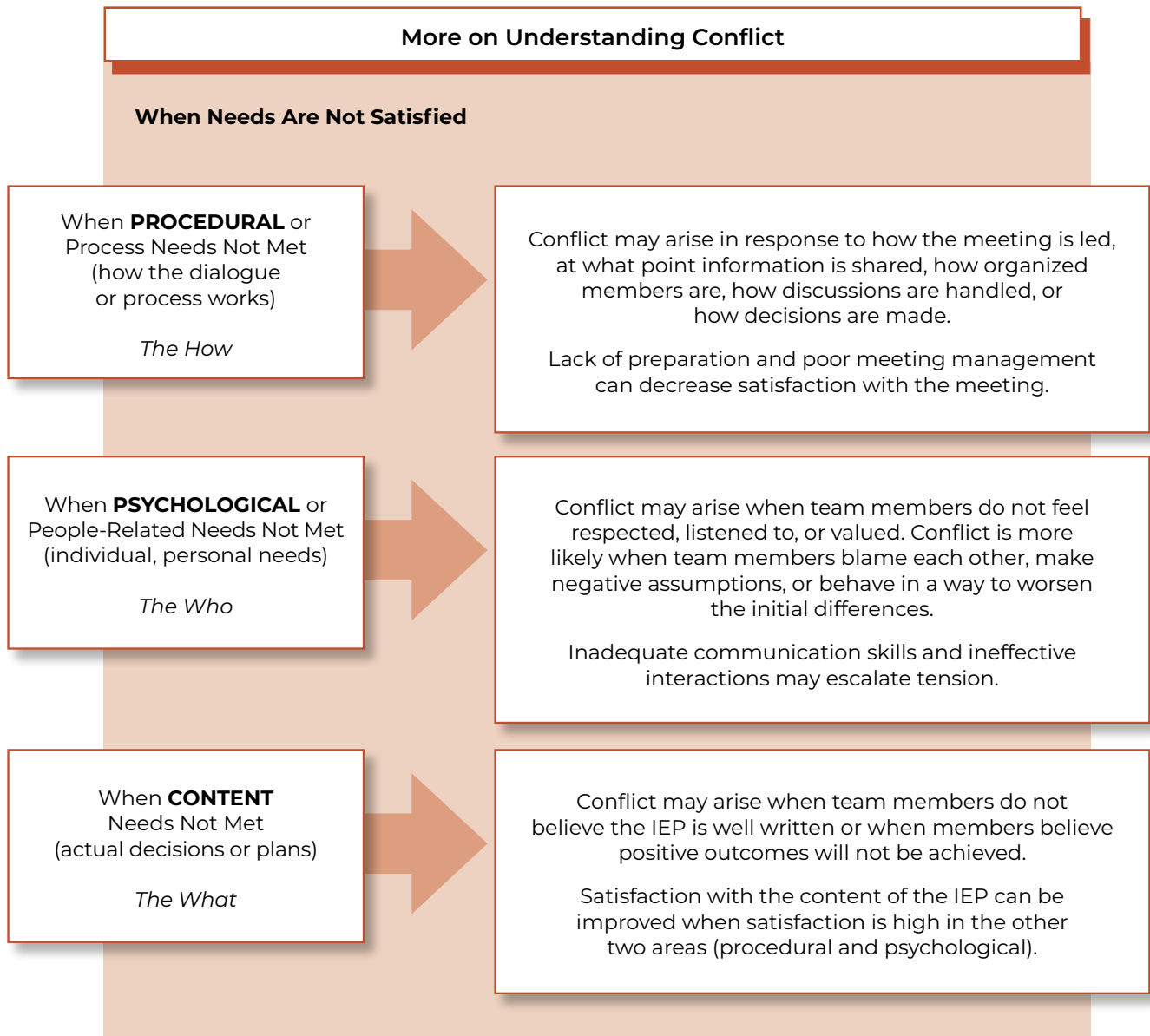
Many special education conflicts can be resolved using less formal and less legal approaches. First parents and educators need to understand conflict.

**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 or satisfied 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)



## Conflict Reduction and Prevention

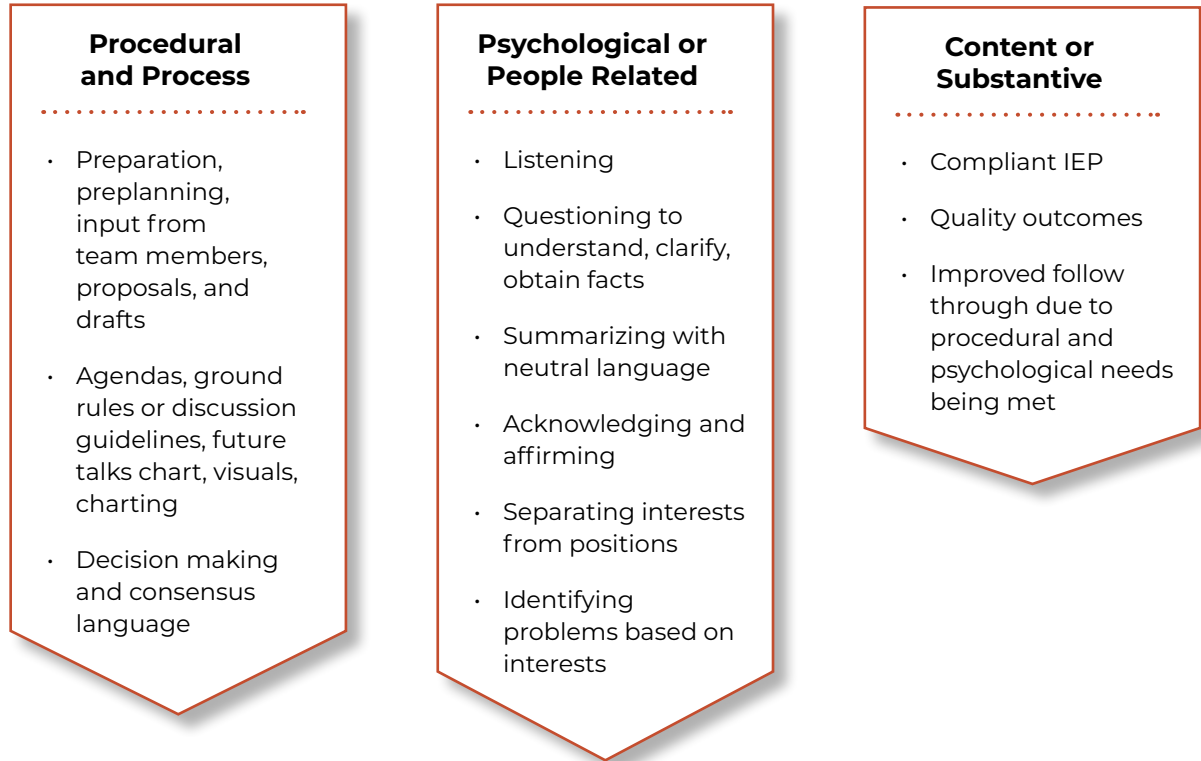
There are many options for “soft” dispute resolution (non legal approaches).

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 agreed up by parent and school; and
- facilitated ARD meetings with an independent facilitator as offered by the Texas Education Agency (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.



If you are concerned about conflict brewing on your ARD committee, talk with your principal or special education staff members about IEP facilitation.

Ask how you and your school can receive training in IEP facilitation and whether a facilitated IEP program is offered by your district or charter school.

Parents and school staff may also seek out facilitation training offered by Texas Education Service Centers.

Using facilitation techniques in meetings and conversations enriches the dialogue around differences, solutions, and implementation AND can serve as a powerful preventive against escalating conflict.



 **TIPS**

Know whether you're advocating for something that is a legal right, a best practice, or something else. Different problems call for different types of parent advocacy.

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

If you have concerns about a compliance-oriented issue, advocating from a legal perspective may be helpful (e.g., holding your team to a time line, maintaining decisions be based on data, questioning changes of placement without full ARD committee discussion, etc.).

**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, or additional, or more individualized, consider using an interests-based approach. 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.

Problem Solving: Legal Approach vs. Interests-Based Approach	
Legal-Based Approach to Problem Solving	Interests-Based Approach to Problem Solving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Express disagreement with ARD/IEP meeting recommendations in writing.</li> <li>Accept the offer to recess and reconvene the meeting when disagreeing with the IEP.</li> <li>Request an independent facilitator.</li> <li>Request mediation.</li> <li>File a complaint.</li> <li>Request a due process hearing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listen with intent to understand.</li> <li>Ask questions to open up the discussion or solicit facts, feelings, thoughts, wants, and needs.</li> <li>Identify the reason(s) behind a request.</li> <li>Combine the interests into a problem statement.</li> <li>Brainstorm possible solutions.</li> <li>Compare possible solutions against a criteria.</li> <li>Accept that consensus allows a range of agreement, from being fully, totally in agreement to "can live with the idea; can support with reservations."</li> </ul>

**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.

## 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.
  - (a) Is it dissatisfaction with the process?
  - (b) Are you or a teammate feeling unheard?
  - (c) Is someone not contributing?
  - (d) Does the team seem to be talking about the wrong issue or only part of the problem?

Pinpointing where your uneasiness comes from allows you to address it.

2. To improve the process: Talk openly with your team about things that will help the process be more effective for you.
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 options team members are supporting (their positions or what they want). Then, combine the interests to form a statement of the problem based on interests.

### Combined Problem Statement

Example	Position (what they want)	Interests (why they want it)
<b>Parent</b>	Wants child 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
<b>Teacher</b>	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
<b>Parent and Teacher</b>	<b>Combined Problem Statement Based on Interests</b>	<b>How can Junior learn the curriculum effectively while remaining connected socially to his classmates?</b>

#### Ways to Write a Problem Statement Based on Interests

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

- 
- 
- 

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

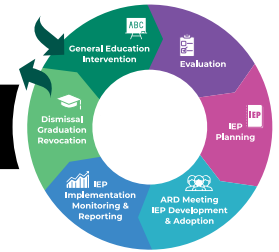
## **BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS**

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, educators sometimes may yield to pressure from adversarial parents — even if it is against their better professional judgment.

School teams strive to keep conflict with parents from impacting 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.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



## ACRONYMS

<b>504</b>	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act	<b>LRE</b>	Least Restrictive Environment
<b>ADA</b>	Americans with Disabilities Act	<b>LSSP</b>	Licensed Specialist in School Psychology
<b>AI</b>	Auditory Impairment	<b>MD</b>	Multiple Disabilities
<b>ARD</b>	Admission, Review and Dismissal	<b>MTTS</b>	Multi-Tiered Systems of Support
<b>ARDC</b>	Admission, Review and Dismissal Committee	<b>OHI</b>	Other Health Impairment
<b>AU</b>	Autism	<b>OH</b>	Orthopedic Impairment
<b>BIL</b>	Bilingual Education	<b>OSEP</b>	Office of Special Programs, U.S. Department of Education
<b>BIP</b>	Behavior Intervention Plan	<b>OT</b>	Occupational Therapy/Therapist
<b>CTE</b>	Career and Technology Education	<b>PBIS</b>	Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports
<b>DB</b>	Deaf Blindness	<b>PGP</b>	Personal Graduation Plan
<b>DPH</b>	Due Process Hearing	<b>PLAAFP</b>	Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance
<b>ECI</b>	Early Childhood Intervention	<b>PT</b>	Physical Therapy/Therapist
<b>ED</b>	Emotional Disturbance	<b>PWN</b>	Prior Written Notice
<b>Ed Diag</b>	Educational Diagnostician	<b>REED</b>	Review of Existing Evaluation Data
<b>ESC</b>	Education Service Centers	<b>RTI</b>	Response to Intervention
<b>ESL</b>	English as a Second Language	<b>SI</b>	Speech Impairment
<b>FAPE</b>	Free Appropriate Public Education	<b>SLD</b>	Specific Learning Disability
<b>FBA</b>	Functional Behavior Assessment	<b>SLP</b>	Speech Language Pathologist
<b>FIE</b>	Full and Individual Evaluation	<b>SOP</b>	Summary of Performance
<b>FIIE</b>	Full and Individual Initial Evaluation	<b>STAAR</b>	State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness
<b>FIEP</b>	Facilitated Individualized Education Program	<b>TAC</b>	Texas Administrative Code (State Board of Education and Commissioner's Rules)
<b>ID</b>	Intellectual Disability	<b>TBI</b>	Traumatic Brain Injury
<b>IDEA</b>	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	<b>TEA</b>	Texas Education Agency
<b>IEE</b>	Individual Educational Evaluation	<b>TEC</b>	Texas Education Code (State Laws)
<b>IEP</b>	Individualized Education Program	<b>TEKS</b>	Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills
<b>LEA</b>	Local Education Agency (Districts and Charters)	<b>TSBVI</b>	Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
<b>LF</b>	Legal Framework	<b>TSD</b>	Texas School for the Deaf
<b>LPAC</b>	Limited Proficiency Assessment Committee	<b>USDE</b>	United States Department of Education

## Parent

**Texas Partners Resource Network**  
prntexas.org



**Texas Project FIRST**  
texasprojectfirst.org  
Toll Free: (800) 866-4726



**Parent Companion — First Five Year**  
parentcompanion.org  
*A guide for Texas parents and caregivers of children with diagnosed or suspected disabilities from birth through 5 years of age. You are not alone. We can help.*



**Texas Parent to Parent**  
txp2p.org  
Toll Free: (866) 896-6001



**National Parent Center on Transition and Employment (PACER)**  
pacer.org/transition



**Centers for Independent Living**  
txsilc.org



**The Arc Capital Area**  
thearc.org  
*For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities*



## State

**IDEA 2004 Legal Framework**  
framework.esc18.net  
*A website with ALL laws, regulations, rules and resources for special education*



**Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)**  
tea.texas.gov  
*State standards for what Texas students should know and be able to do*



**SPEDTex, the Texas Special Education Information Center**  
spedtex.org  
(855) 773-3839  
*Resource to inform and support parents, teachers and anyone committed to the success of children with disabilities*



**Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism Training (TSLAT) at Education Service Center, Region 13**  
txautism.net



**Autism Society of Texas**  
texasautismsociety.org



**Texas Association of the Deaf**  
txad.org



**Behavior/Social Emotional at Education Service Center, Region 13**  
www4.esc13.net/behavior



**Texas Transition**  
transitionintexas.org  
*Texas Transition & Employment Guide*



**Texas Education Agency (TEA)**  
tea.texas.gov  
*Various webpages on Special Education and Special Education Dispute Resolution Processes*



**Response to Intervention (Rtl)**  
tea.texas.gov  
*Multi-tiered approach for struggling learners*



**Special Education, Facilitating IEPs (FIEP) at Education Service Center, Region 13**  
www4.esc13.net/fiep  
**IEP Facilitation or FIEP website in Livebinder.com**  
tinyurl.com/IEP-Facilitation



**Progress in the General Curriculum (PGC)**  
https://projects.esc20.net/page/pgc.  
Parents  
*Region 20 in collaboration with Region 4 Parents: Featured Resources*



**Learning Disabilities Association of Texas**  
Ldatx.org



**Texas Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments**  
afb.org



**Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation**  
Twc.state.tx.us/partners/programs-peopledisabilities



**Texas Health & Human Services Commission (HHSC)**  
hhs.texas.gov



**Navigate Life Texas**  
navigatelifetexas.org



## National

**U.S. Department of Education (USDE)**  
www.ed.gov  
**Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)**  
www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html



**U. S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS)**  
hhs.gov  
**Office of Civil Rights (OCR)**  
hhs.gov/ocr



**National Center for Learning Disabilities**  
ncld.org



**Understood**  
understood.org/en  
*For learning & attention issues*



**Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) of America**  
ldaamerica.org



**Autism Society**  
autism-society.org



**Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)**  
cec.sped.org



**United Cerebral Palsy**  
http://ucp.org  
*Life without limits for people with disabilities*



**American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)**  
afb.org



**National Association of the Deaf**  
nad.org



**National Association of School Psychologist (NASP)**  
nasponline.org



**American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)**  
asha.org



**American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA)**  
aota.org



**American Physical Therapy Association (APTA)**  
apta.org



**National Technical Assistance Center for Transition (NTACT)**  
transitionata.org



**National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET)**  
ncset.org



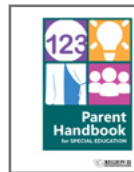
**CADRE: The National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education**  
directionservice.org/cadre



## Parent Handbook Toolkit

Go to [www.livebinders.com](http://www.livebinders.com).  
Search for IEP Facilitation or fiep.

For the **Parent Handbook for SPECIAL EDUCATION**, click on the handbook in either English or Spanish.



For the Toolkit, click on **Parent Handbook Tools**. Find sample forms, agendas, checklists, transition and graduation info, communication logs, and many more tools for parents and educators.

## More Info on Facilitated IEPs

Go to [www.livebinders.com](http://www.livebinders.com).  
Search for IEP Facilitation or fiep.

Find many FREE resources: videos, handouts, and training materials on facilitation. Share the materials with your school team.



**Facilitation Tips: Discussions, Decision, and Challenges.**  
ESC Region 13 Product Store:  
[store.esc13.net](http://store.esc13.net)



**Education Service Center, Region 13 E-Campus Catalog:** <https://ecampus.esc13.net/login.html>

Online course, **The Basics: Facilitating IEPs**, introduces facilitation skills, techniques, and resources.

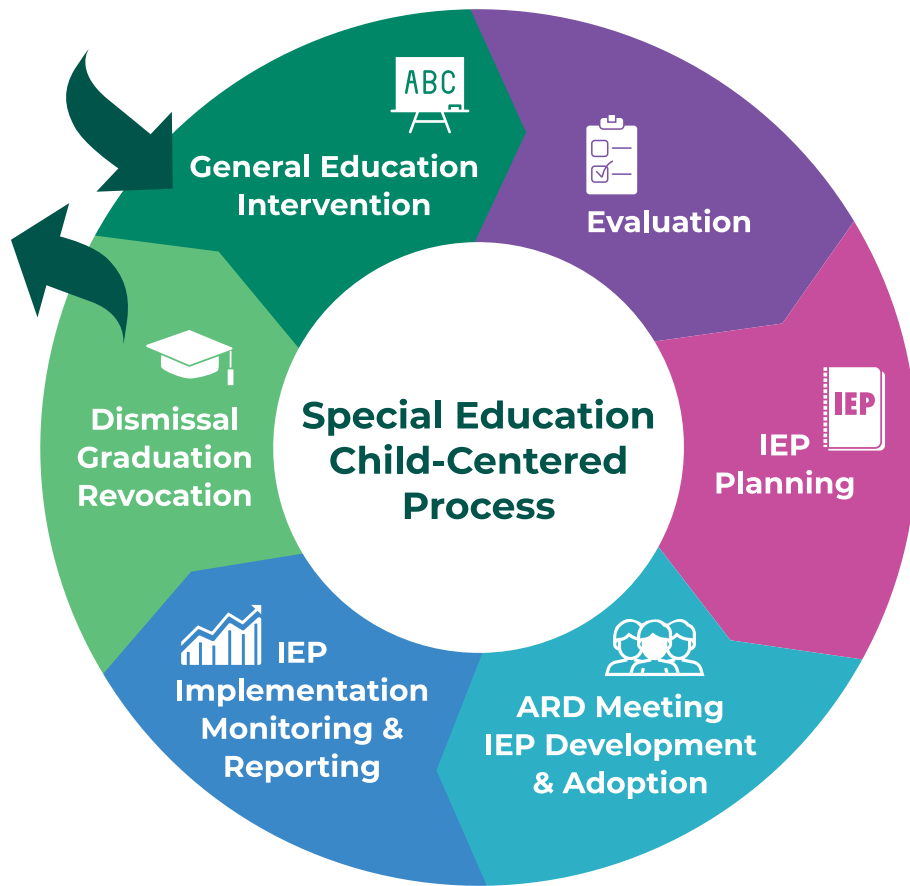
Online course, **School Leaders and Conflict**, provides skills and strategies to address conflict from the administrator's viewpoint.

## IEP Facilitation

Facilitation is a term used for a set of principles, skills, and practices aimed at helping people make collaborative decisions. In special education, **facilitative** approaches may be used throughout the entire child-centered process: **before, during, and after** meetings. In a **Facilitated IEP (FIEP)** meeting, the facilitator focuses on process, not content. The facilitator helps the team communicate, problem-solve and make decisions.

## IEP Facilitation in Texas

IEP Facilitation — Texas Style		
<b>CAMPUS</b> Facilitation used by all recommend	<b>DISTRICT/CHARTER</b> IEP Facilitation Program encouraged by TEC §29.019	<b>TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY (TEA)</b> Required by §29.020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All IEP team members are trained in facilitation.</li> <li>• Use of facilitation is a routine way of conducting meetings and interacting with parents.</li> <li>• IEP team members recognize that collaboration occurs before, during, and after the meeting.</li> <li>• All team members use facilitation skills and practices to improve interactions and decisions.</li> <li>• Team members intervene in a facilitative manner to improve the group's effectiveness.</li> <li>• Campus may use a campus level facilitator to assist with all IEP meetings.</li> <li>• Campus may offer a more neutral internal or external facilitator.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A district or charter may choose, but is not required, to offer an IEP facilitation program.</li> <li>• If program offered, parents must be provided information regarding facilitation.</li> <li>• Parents must be provided procedures about how to request IEP facilitation.</li> <li>• Facilitators are not IEP team members and cannot give input or an opinion on the development of the IEP.</li> <li>• The facilitator may be an employee, an independent contractor, or other qualified individual.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TEA offers IEP facilitation as a dispute resolution option at no cost to parent or school.</li> <li>• The dispute must relate to an ARD in which mutual agreement about required IEP elements was not reached, and the committee agreed to recess and reconvene.</li> <li>• Parent and school file completed form with TEA within 5 calendar days of the meeting, and a facilitator must be available on the date set for reconvening the ARD.</li> <li>• If conditions met, TEA assigns facilitator who contacts the parent and school to clarify issues, gather information and explain IEP facilitation.</li> <li>• Contact (512) 463-9414</li> </ul>



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