

Special Education Advocacy Tips

We know that having a child who receives special education services can be stressful. We hope the following advocacy tips will assist you to work with your child's school to create a plan that helps your child succeed.

You have the right to your child's education related records.

- Ask the school for a copy of your child's IEP (individual education program).
- Ask for a copy of the BIP (behavior intervention plan) and FBA (functional behavioral assessment) if applicable.
- Print copies of relevant communications with the school and keep these with your records.
- Keep records of any requests you have made to the school about your child's education and services.
- Keep records of any assessment plans, assessment reports, sample work, and progress reports.
- Keep records of behavior incident reports or request them from the school if you have not received them.
- Make sure to request any records days before the IEP meeting so that you have time to review the records to prepare for the IEP meeting.
- Organize the records in a way that works for you and will be easily accessible to you.

We always recommend communicating in writing.

- Email is a great way to communicate because any emails sent to the school regarding your child become part of the educational records.
- If there are phone call discussions or in-person conversations that you believe are important to document, follow up with an email and provide a recap/summary of the conversation, including any next steps individuals should take.
- If you are called and asked to pick up your child early, follow up with an email stating that the school asked you to pick up your child early. This will allow you to keep track of dates of any informal suspensions.
- Always be polite and courteous in your written communications to the school, but do not be afraid about voicing questions or concerns.

Your child should participate in their IEP meeting.

- Teach your child how to advocate for their own needs by having your child participate in IEP meetings whenever possible.
- Ask your child what supports they need or want, what things they find difficult at school, and ideas they have for how school staff can help them.

- Involving your child in the decisions, when appropriate, helps them take ownership of the plan rather than feel that adults are forcing plans on them that may or may not help.

It is okay to ask for help and seek out additional resources.

- Reach out to advocates if you have concerns and do not hesitate to share the goals you have for your child.
- Some organizations provide parent advocates that can answer your questions or can attend IEP meetings with you.
 - ASK Resource Center is a nonprofit organization that supports families with disabilities by providing parent training and information on special education.
 - More information about ASK Resource Center can be found at this link: <https://www.askresource.org/>
 - i3 Iowa IDEA Information is a guidance system created by the Iowa Department of Education and the AEAs to provide special education resources. More information can be found at this link: <https://iowaideainformation.org/>.
 - The Iowa Department of Education's website contains helpful information including the procedural safeguards manual and a list of common special education acronyms. Additional information can be found at this link: <https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/special-education/parent-information>.
 - You can also call the Iowa Department of Education to ask for guidance or report issues you are facing. Contact the team member assigned to your AEA at this link: <https://educate.iowa.gov/pk-12/special-education>

You have the right to participate in, and consent to, decisions made about your child's education.

- You must be given the opportunity to participate in meetings relevant to the identification, evaluation, and placement of your child.
- This includes receiving notice for any meetings.
- To make sure a parent can full participate the school or AEA must provide an interpreter to parents who are Deaf or whose primary language is not English.
- The school must have parental consent to do any of the following:
 - Conduct evaluations
 - Begin special education services
 - Seek reimbursement from health insurance providers
 - Disclose personally identifiable information

In some situations, you have the right to an Independent Educational Evaluation.

- An Independent Education Evaluation (IEE) is an evaluation done by an examiner who does not work for your child's school district.
- You always have the right to get an IEE that you are willing to pay for.
- You have the right to a free IEE if you disagree with the district's evaluation except for in the following situations:
 - The district proves in a due process hearing that their evaluation was appropriate
 - The district proves in a due process hearing that the evaluation you ordered did not satisfy the district's requirements

The following link includes a sample form to request an IEE.

<https://iowaideainformation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Independent-Educational-Evaluation-Request-Form-1.pdf>