

How to Prepare for Your Upcoming IEP/504 Meeting



Yay for IEP/504 Meetings! Isn't every parent excited to be told how much their child is struggling in school and excited to rush through a year of supports for their child in 30 minutes? I think not! IEP/504 Meetings (Meetings) can be nerve-wrecking, exhausting, and frustrating for many parents. We wish we could wave our magic wands and take all those feelings away from you. While we cannot do that, we can try to help you prepare and make the Meeting as meaningful and painless as we can. Here are some tips for preparing for the Meeting to help get the most out of your Meeting to get the best IEP/504 Plan (Plan).

At Least Two Weeks Before Your Meeting

- ***Make sure you have a copy of your child's current IEP/504 (Plan).*** If you don't have one, request a copy of it from your child's special education teacher/school administrator in charge of special education (for IEPs) or your school/child's 504 Liaison (for 504 Plans).
- ***Request a draft copy of the new Plan the school is proposing for you to review before the Meeting.*** Schools are not required to provide you with a copy of the new Plan Draft but you are allowed to request it. Let the 504 Liaison or Special Education Teacher/Administrator know that by receiving the Plan Draft it will help you prepare to meaningfully participate in the Meeting (meaningful participation is the legal language that parents are entitled to at the Meeting for IEPs and best practices for 504s) and make the most out of the time allotted for the Meeting as you can provide feedback before the meeting for the school members to consider. You can use our WTD Form in our Forms Section to request the Plan Draft or you can send an email requesting it.
- ***Review the date, time, and time allotted for the Meeting on your Prior Written Notice (otherwise known as your Meeting Notice) to make sure it still works for you.*** If you cannot make the Meeting, please let the school know as they have secured their staff's time to attend the Meeting. If you are worried that the school has not allotted enough time for the Meeting and it is a hardship for you to attend multiple Meetings, request extra time for the Meeting and let the school know why it is hardship for you (i.e. difficult to take time off work, issues with childcare, etc.). As many schools are short staffed, if you can work with the school's request of time, it will be appreciated by them. However, Meeting times need to be mutually agreed upon (another legal term!) by the parent and school staff. The law supports the school working with the parents' availability to get them to participate in the Meeting as long as the parent is being reasonable.
- ***Consider if there is anyone want to bring to the Meeting with you for support and invite them to the Meeting.*** It can be good to bring anyone to the Meeting who knows your child well or provides needed services (i.e. tutors, therapists, specialists) to your child but you can also bring anyone want to provide you support. If they cannot come to the Meeting, you can ask them to write any insights they have about your child and make any recommendations for school support. If you provide their written information to the school before or at the Meeting, the school team must consider the recommendations as part of your Parent Input. You do not have to let the school know who you are bringing unless you are bringing an attorney as schools have a right to bring legal representation if you do, but schools do like to know who might be coming with you if you are comfortable in sharing. If you feel like you need more professional support at the Meeting, you can also hire an advocate to review your child's IEP and attend the meeting with you. We have advocates available through WID or find someone in your local area or someone you are comfortable with. Each state is required to have a parent advocacy center to support parents. The list of parent advocacy centers can be found [here](https://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/) or at <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/>. Sometimes schools get nervous if you bring an advocate and think you have a problem with the school or IEP. If this is not the case, you can let the school know you are bringing an advocate with you to help you understand more about your child's needs and what school services are available that you might not know about.

One Week Before the Meeting

- **Review your child's current Plan and mark it up with any changes you recommend.** For IEPs, try to get a sense of where your child was last year in each area of struggle (i.e. math, behavior, social skills), what your child's goals were, and what accommodations, modifications, and services your child received last year so that you can see if your child made progress since last IEP and determine what you want to make sure transfers over to your child's new IEP. For 504s, look at the accommodations and modifications and determine if they still work for your child. You can recommend removing, changing, or adding any other tweaks of the classroom, policies, teaching, or any other support you think your child needs. We recommend highlighting and/or making notes on anything in the Plan that you want to keep, want to change, or want to ask questions about. Bring your marked up copy of the Plan to the Meeting.
- **If you received a Plan Draft, send any comments, questions, or concerns you have about anything in it to 504 Liaison or your child's special education teacher to consider or change before the Meeting.** The Plan is supposed to be written in a way that a parent understands the document so if you don't understand something, please ask about it! It is helpful if you put why you disagree and/or want something changed and how the change is important for or will benefit your child. The 504 Liaison or special education teacher/administrator may update the Plan with your recommendations. If they do not update the Plan or you aren't sure if they did, write down these recommendations/changes and present them at the Meeting as Parent Input or Parent Educational Concerns (see below).
- **Draft your Parent Educational Concerns to be inputted or considered for the Plan and send it to the 504 Liaison/your child's special education teacher to include and/or consider in the IEP.** For 504s, best practices are that schools consider parental input. For IEPs, parents have a Parent Educational Concern Section in the IEP where you can put in any concern you have written in your own words. Even if the school does not like what you write or does not agree with you, you have a right to freely put whatever concerns you have in this section. We recommended that you limit your concerns about your child or your child's services to the most important concerns you have for the school to focus on and/or on any services that you feel are necessary for the school to provide to help your child make progress in your educational goals for them. Having focused concerns (and not too many of them) helps the school staff to hone in on what really matters to you and address your biggest concerns. For all concerns you have, please write them in enough detail to thoroughly explain your concern so that someone reading your concerns can easily understand why they matter to you and what you are asking for. It is also helpful to put how you would like the school to address the concern if you have ideas on what you would like the school to do to help solve the issue.
- **Provide Parent Input for consideration for services in 504 Plans or to add to the IEP Present Levels.** For 504s, you can provide the school staff any input you have on your child that they need to know to provide support for your child or that supports anything you are requesting in the 504. It can be attached to the 504 if you ask. For IEPs, parents can add to the Present Level section under the heading of Parent Input. It is recommended that you can put important information you want the school to know about your child or consider that may not yet be identified in the IEP or put anything you see differently that the school does at home about your child. If there are techniques that work for your child to engage in schoolwork or help your child in any school struggles, share that with the IEP Team in your Parent Input. Both the Parent Educational Concerns and Parent Input should be added to your child's IEP in writing in the body of the document or attached to it. The school may ask to summarize these sections or paraphrase them. If you do not want them to summarize your words or don't feel like the summary addresses your concerns, you can ask the school to put your concerns/input as you have written them. If your writing does not fit in the document section as it is too long, you can ask the IEP Team to write "see attached" and they can attach it to your IEP. The IEP Team must consider your input and concerns and not ignore them when crafting the IEP. However, schools may disagree with the parent or may not implement everything the parent wants. At the Meeting, your concerns and input should be presented to the IEP Team and should be thoughtfully discussed and considered. Ask to read the Concerns/Input to the team or have the school staff read them. If the school does not implement something you feel is necessary for your child, you have the right to disagree with the IEP at the end of the Meeting and/or file a complaint to resolve the disagreement between you and the school for IEPs and 504s.