FAQ from Families about Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

1. How can I prepare and participate in an IEP meeting?

You know your child best. Your participation in developing an appropriate IEP should be expected and welcomed. You can share strengths and preferences related to learning and daily living. You can share goals that you would like to see achieved and any concerns that you have regarding learning and social development. Consider the following:

- **Review your meeting notice.** This notice will include information such as the date and time the meeting will take place, location of the meeting and the purpose of the meeting. Additionally, individuals that will be in attendance will be listed along with the role they serve on the IEP team. IEP meetings should be held at a mutually agreed upon time and place. Schools and AEAs must notify parents/guardians of the meeting early enough to ensure that they will have an opportunity to attend. (Refer to question #3 if you would like to consider rescheduling)

- **Review past school documents.** You can find IEP progress reports, past IEPs and related documents in the state of Iowa's IEP management system, the ACHIEVE Family Portal. You may also request these documents from the school. Additionally, you can review report cards, behavior/office referrals, or any other school documentation you feel is important to discuss.

- **Let the team know that you would like any information that will be shared at the meeting to be provided to you ahead of time so that you have a chance to review it.** This can include a copy of the meeting agenda, data reports, incident reports or other relevant documentation.

- **Gather any records or reports that you would like to share with the IEP team.** Consider sharing those records and reports ahead of time so that other IEP team members have time to review them prior to the meeting, such as therapy reports or diagnostic information from doctors.

- **Research topics or information that you have questions about.** The i3: Iowa IDEA Information site (www.iowaideainformation.org) is a resource to help families and professionals understand the guidance and procedures around IEPs. Additional resources to increase knowledge and support family participation in the IEP process can be found on the following websites:
    - ASK Resource Center (www.askresource.org)
    - Transition Iowa (www.transitioniowa.org)

- **Connect with people who can support you and your participation early in the process.** Therapists, case managers, or other parents will have experience and can lend some insight. ASK Resource Center staff can also help families understand the IEP process and their rights at no cost. You can also invite anyone that you'd like to attend the meeting with you. This could be someone with special knowledge about your child or anyone who can support you and take notes.

- **Review your child's proposed draft IEP.** You can request a draft IEP with proposed changes before the meeting. Highlight anything that you have questions or concerns about. You could reach out to the special education teacher ahead of time to ask them to explain any sections that you have questions about.

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- **Talk with your child to make sure that their input is included.** If you feel it is appropriate, have your child attend their IEP meeting.

- **Language used may be unfamiliar.** If you do not understand something that has been discussed or if you have questions, it is appropriate to ask for an explanation to help you participate.

2. What do I do if I have a concern about my child's IEP or the supports and services that are being provided and there is not an IEP meeting scheduled?

There may come a time when you have a concern about the special education supports and services that your child is receiving. Resolving conflict at the lowest level can be done by requesting an IEP meeting (sample letter available on ASK website) to discuss your concerns. Parents may request an IEP meeting at any time by contacting members of your child's IEP team which may include the general and special education teachers, the building administrator and team members from the Area Education Agency (AEA).

In addition to requesting an IEP meeting, prioritize your concerns and put them in writing. If you have requested an IEP meeting, you can choose to share ahead of time or bring them to the meeting.

3. Can I request to reschedule or postpone an IEP meeting?

You have the right to attend your child's IEP meeting and can request that the meeting be rescheduled. The IEP must be updated at least annually. There may be time constraints around how far out the meeting can be rescheduled.

IEP meetings should be held at a mutually agreed upon time and place. All team members should try to be as flexible as possible. It can be difficult to coordinate the schedules of all individuals that need to attend.

You may try providing some dates and times that work best for your family and any others that you would like to invite such as advocates, therapists and other community providers that serve your child.

4. When should I receive a copy of my child's IEP and data?

Parents/guardians should always receive a copy of their child's IEP within a reasonable time following an IEP meeting. This may be a hard copy or an electronic copy, depending on whether you have given consent for electronic communication. Parents/guardians have the right to request their child's IEP at any time. This request could be made to the special education teacher or AEA staff.

Parents/guardians should receive IEP goal progress updates at least as often as students receive report cards. You can request to receive updated copies of your child's data and graphs more frequently or at any time. You may want to put this request in writing if it is different from what the IEP indicates for the frequency of reporting progress.

The ACHIEVE Family Portal allows families to have access to their child's IEP and related documents at any time. The Family Portal also provides families with a way to see their child's data as it is entered into the system and stay up to date on their progress.

5. What should I do if I disagree with what my child's school district or AEA is proposing in an IEP meeting?

If you do not agree with a proposal or refusal to make a change to your child's IEP, you can request that the school district or AEA document the proposed or refused change in a Prior Written Notice (PWN). The PWN allows you to formally disagree with the proposal or refusal to change your child's IEP, if you choose. Some examples of proposals or refusals might include:

- Change in educational placement.
- Additional services or supports.
- Evaluating the child in a new area or performance domain.

6. Do I have to sign my child's IEP agreeing to the changes?

Schools are required to provide a PWN, documenting any proposed or refused changes to the IEP, within a reasonable time after the IEP meeting. This allows a parent/guardian to disagree prior to the implementation date. Unless formal action is taken, the school has the right to begin the changes on the implementation date (more information about PWN on ASK's website). In the state of Iowa, parents/guardians are only required to sign consent for the following reasons:

- To agree to an evaluation for special education service.
- To agree to your child receiving special education services once it is determined they are eligible for special education.
- To receive electronic communication.
- To agree to the school district billing Medicaid.

After consent for initial special education services, there is no requirement for parents/guardians to sign for approval for IEPs or to allow changes to the IEP to begin.

Related Resources
Look for these other resources at www.askresource.org.
- Sample letter: Requesting an IEP meeting
- Prior Written Notice

Look for this resource at the Iowa Department of Education Website https://educate.iowa.gov/
- ACHIEVE Family Portal Frequently Asked Questions for Families