

THE IEP PROCESS

The IDEA law mandates specific steps to create an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). While each child's situation is unique, the following is a general list of the steps involved in developing an IEP.

1. Identify a Need - Pre-Referral

This step involves documenting the challenges or difficulties a child is experiencing in the school environment. A parent or the school can initiate this process. However, the school must have parental consent. At this stage, parents and school personnel may administer initial interventions designed to prevent the need for formal special education services, if possible.

2. Address A Demonstrated Need - Referral

When there are clearly visible indications of disability, this step is immediately activated. The child is referred for formal assessment. The parent can also request a formal assessment but submitting a written request to the school.

3. Evaluate the Student - Assessment

A multidisciplinary team assesses the child using a multifactorial evaluation (MFE) process. Quantitative and qualitative data are combined with information from the student's family members and healthcare providers. If the parents disagree with the evaluation results, they may request an independent educational evaluation (IEE), which is paid for by the school.

4. Determine Eligibility - Evaluation

The IEP team, which includes a parent, reviews the evaluation and determines the range of special education and related services needed. If the student is eligible, the team must develop the IEP within 30 days. If the student is ineligible, he or she remains the responsibility of general educators.

5. Develop the IEP - Plan Development

The IEP team meets to:

- Discuss the individualized services the school will provide to the child.
- Define customized educational goals.
- Define progress monitoring and measurement tools.

The parents must provide written consent before services can begin. If the parents disagree with the IEP plan and are unable to resolve it with the IEP team, they may request mediation or a special hearing.

6. Measure Progress - Monitoring

An IEP will include measurable goals that are reviewed at pre-determined intervals.

7. Review the IEP - Plan Review

In most states, the student's IEP is reviewed annually. However, 15 states conduct reviews every three years. If needed, the IEP can be revised throughout the year at the request of the parent or based on the recommendation of the IEP team. Minor adjustments in goals or benchmarks don't require a new IEP or a formal IEP meeting.

8. Reevaluate the Student - Plan Reevaluation

The student must be reevaluated at least every three years to determine if the same level of special education services is required as outlined in the current IEP. The student can be reevaluated more often if requested by the parents or school.

Grievance Process and Dispute Resolution

If the parents disagree with the initial evaluation or with the proposed plan, there is a formal grievance process they can follow with assistance from the IEP coordinator:

- Request an independent evaluation.
- File a written complaint.
- Participate in due process hearings.
- Participate in mediation.
- File a complaint with the state education agency, if mediation is not successful.