



# IEP basics: tips for teachers

**What is an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?** *The IEP is the written statement that describes the educational plan designed to meet the child's individual needs. It states the goals for the child for the upcoming year. It is required for every child (three years of age and older) who qualifies for special education. It is developed by a team that includes members of the school staff and the parents. A representative from the child's Head Start program should also participate.*

The IEP is developed by the team and finalized at a meeting with the team. Parent input is very important. Teacher input is also important, as it is often the teacher who can make sure that goals are functional and meaningful. Here are some tips to help make the IEP and the IEP process as useful as possible.

## **Important terms:**

**IDEA:** The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** is the federal law that guides the delivery of special education services in the United States.

**FAPE:** **Free and appropriate public education** is required for all children with disabilities ages three through twenty-one years. FAPE is guaranteed by IDEA.

**Annual Goals:** The child's IEP must include measurable, annual goals that are related to meeting the child's educational needs.

**LRE:** According to the federal law, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with IEPs are to receive their education in the **least restrictive environment**. The general education classroom such as a Head Start classroom would be considered the least restrictive environment for many children.

**Related services:** Related services is the term used in the federal law for those services that an individual child might need in order to benefit from special education. Examples are school psychology, speech therapy, occupational therapy and others. If the IEP team determines that the child needs related services, the service is written on the IEP.

## **What happens in the classroom after an IEP is developed?**

The IEP serves as the "road map" for guiding the teaching team in helping the child accomplish the important goals and objectives that have been outlined. It outlines the supports and services the child needs. It is the shared responsibility of the school district personnel, and the Head Start personnel to develop teaching plans that help a child achieve these goals and objectives. This means that the daily, weekly and/or monthly lesson plans should provide some specific directions for teaching the child.

## **What do these supports and services need to be aimed at?**

These supports and services should help the teaching team help the child participate in and learn from the general classroom curriculum. In addition, the child will need specialized instruction in order to meet the IEP goals and objectives.



### **Does anyone help me implement the IEP?**

Yes! The Head Start teacher as well as the school district personnel should be working together to assist the child in the classroom. In addition, the Head Start program provides a disability coordinator who helps to coordinate the disability services for the Head Start program and often works as the liaison with the school district. Head Starts and school districts can work together in a variety of ways. Sometimes a consulting teacher or therapist from the school district works with the Head Start teacher to help design specialized instruction, problem solve, and review child performance data. Other times, the school district provides an itinerant (or visiting) teacher or therapist who comes to the Head Start program on a regular basis and works directly with the child to provide specialized instruction or therapy. The itinerant teacher/therapist should also help the Head Start teacher carry out special plans for the time in between the visits. Again, this person should help the teacher problem solve and review child performance data. Sometimes, the specialized instruction or therapy is provided at another school or center. This can make it more difficult for the Head Start teacher to know how to help the child. The disability coordinator should help the Head Start teacher get the support that he/she needs.

### **What is the role of the Head Start teacher?**

The Head Start teacher can provide important information to the process of developing the IEP. The Head Start teacher knows what the child can do in the classroom as well as the child's interests. The Head Start teacher also knows what the child is having difficulty with and where he or she needs more help. This is the kind of information that can be shared with the IEP team so that the IEP that is developed is truly functional and meaningful.

The Head Start teacher helps to implement the IEP and helps the child make progress toward learning the goals that are written on the IEP. As stated before, this is a shared responsibility with the school district. One of the important roles for the Head Start teacher is to collect information about the child's progress on a periodic basis.

### **Do I get a copy of the IEP?**

Yes! The Head Start teacher is an important member of the team and plays a vital role in carrying out the plans to help the child achieve his/her IEP goals.

### **Where do I keep the IEP?**

Keep your copy of the child's IEP with their other educational plans. Keep it in a place where you can find it and use it to guide your lesson planning as well as in your conversations with the school district personnel who help the child.

### **What's the role of parents and other family members?**

Parents have the right to participate in all decisions related to the education of their child. They are encouraged to attend and participate in IEP and other meetings. They are the ultimate decision makers.