



**Building IEPs With Maryland Families**

# **What A Great IDEA!**



**A Guide To  
Developing,  
Implementing  
and Reviewing  
IEPs For Students  
With Disabilities**



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## The IEP – **A Foundation for Learning**

**M**aryland’s education system is guided by the fundamental belief that all children can learn. If educational opportunities are provided in appropriate settings, children can grow to their fullest potential.

Providing educational opportunities for children requires an action plan—a foundation for learning. For students with disabilities, that plan is called the Individualized Education Program, or IEP.

The IEP is a written document outlining the who, what, when, why, where and how of instruction and related services that are to be provided to a student with disabilities.

IEPs are built upon the strengths of individual students and are designed to help each student achieve success in school, at home, at work, and in the community. In Maryland, each school system is required to use the Statewide IEP format.

This guide, **Building IEPs With Maryland Families**, offers a fresh perspective for families and professionals working together to develop IEPs for students with disabilities living in Maryland.

Welcome!



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## Getting to Know the Floor Plan: **The Purpose of the IEP**

### **Why Building IEPs With Maryland Families Is Such A Great IDEA**

IDEA, or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, requires that IEPs be developed for students with disabilities. IDEA establishes that a written plan must specify how education, related services, and support will be delivered to a student with disabilities. That written plan is called an IEP, or Individualized Education Program. **The IEP identifies special education and related service supports needed for a student with a disability.**

Think of developing the IEP as if you were building a family's home. Before you begin building, you would speak to the family to learn how the family lives and what the family wants in their home. You would identify the family's wants and needs and gain an understanding of what is important to everyone in the family. The same holds true for building IEPs. Schools and related service and support providers must work with families to gain insight into each student's personality, history, educational experiences, and learning styles. Active family involvement is essential to each student's success. That's why building IEPs with Maryland families is such a great IDEA!

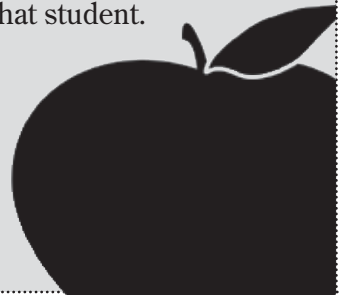
### **Let's Get Started**

The IEP allows everyone with a role in teaching, nurturing, and supporting the student to help determine where the student is going, how the student will get there, how long it may take, and what's needed along the way. Before laying out plans, gathering information, or assembling IEP team members, everyone must understand the purpose of the IEP, how it is developed, and how it is to be used.

Let's begin with the principles that guide IEP development in Maryland.

## The Principles Guiding IEP Development in Maryland

- ❁ All children can learn.
- ❁ Successful learning involves successful home and school partnerships.
- ❁ All students have a right to attend schools in which they can progress and learn.
- ❁ All students should have an opportunity to learn equally rigorous content.
- ❁ Schools should help prepare students for productive adult lives.
- ❁ Special education is specifically-designed instruction and related services to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities.
- ❁ Planning for students with disabilities requires flexibility and an open mind.
- ❁ To the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are to be educated with students who are non-disabled.
- ❁ The IEP is based upon a student's ability to participate and progress in the general education curriculum, with appropriate adaptations to meet the unique needs of that student.



Additionally, the student with a disability must be educated in the **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**. This means that to the maximum extent appropriate, the student is educated with students who are non-disabled. Separate schooling or other removal of the student from the general education environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.



## Who Develops the IEP

The IEP is written at a meeting where observations, assessment results, classroom data, and progress notes are presented and discussed by the IEP team. During the meeting, the opinions of all team members are heard in a respectful, open environment.

The IEP team includes the student's parents, a general education teacher, a special educator, a public agency representative, an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results, and as appropriate, the student for whom the IEP is being developed.

Under IDEA 2004, there are new rules about who can and cannot be excused from an IEP team meeting and how they can be excused.

## The IEP Team

1. The **parents** know their child best and can discuss their child's personality and history. Parents offer insight into past educational experiences and can help team members understand the student's strengths, needs, frustrations, and interests. Parents and students may invite anyone they choose to attend the meeting.
2. The **general education teacher** has knowledge of the school's general education curriculum requirements.
3. The **special educator** or special education provider knows specialized techniques and strategies for instruction and will likely provide services to the student.
4. A **public agency representative** is an individual qualified to provide or supervise the provision of specially-designed instruction to meet the student's unique needs. The person should know about the general curriculum and availability of resources, and be able to commit these resources to implement the IEP.
5. An **individual who can interpret instructional implications of the evaluation results** may be one of the teachers, the public agency representative, or appropriate related service personnel.

6. An **individual who has knowledge or special expertise regarding the student** may be a related service provider such as an occupational or physical therapist.
7. Since **the student** is the focal point of IEP development, whenever possible (and if determined appropriate), the student should attend the IEP meeting. Beginning at age 14, the school should invite the student to the IEP meeting when transition planning takes place. If the student is unable to attend the IEP meeting, consideration for the student's preferences and interests is to be ensured by the public agency representative along with the parents.

## Parental Notification



## What Is In the IEP

In addition to personal information such as the student's name and address, the IEP contains the following components.

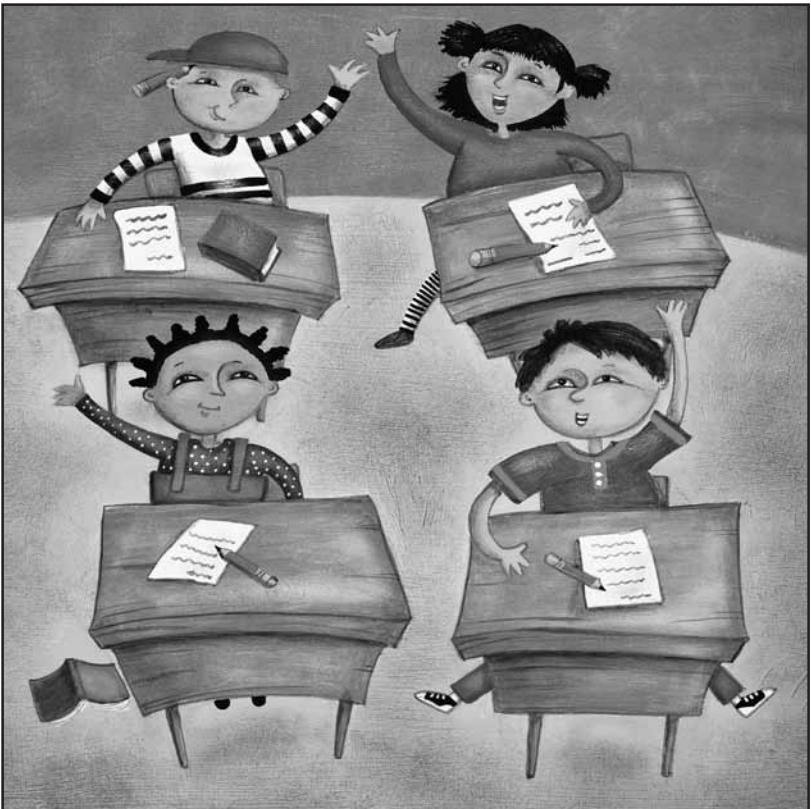


- A. Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance:** Provides a holistic view of the student based on data and information from a variety of sources, technically sound assessment tools, and strategies to gather academic, developmental, and functional performance. This information assists the team in determining the educational needs of the student in relationship to the student's involvement and progress in the general curriculum or appropriate preschool activities. (*Statewide IEP, Section II*)
- B. Participation in Statewide Assessments:** As part of the IEP decision-making process, the IEP team identifies the Statewide assessments in which the student will participate. All students must be included to the fullest extent possible in all Statewide assessment programs and their assessment results are a part of Maryland's Statewide assessment system. (*Statewide IEP, Section I*)
- C. Special Considerations:** As appropriate, the IEP team may include a behavioral intervention plan, positive behavioral supports, the needs of a student with limited English proficiency, and the provision of Braille for a student who is blind or has vision impairments. For the student who is deaf or hard-of-hearing, language and communication needs must be discussed. Assistive technology must be considered for all students. (*Statewide IEP, Section III*)
- D. Statement of Special Education and Related Services:** Describes the delivery of specially-designed instruction, related services, and supplementary aids and services, as well as a statement of program modifications or supports for school personnel. (*Statewide IEP, Section III*)



- A. Supplementary Aids and Services:** Outlines the exact nature of specialized services or devices required to enable the student to progress toward annual goals while participating in the general curriculum. Examples include, but are not limited to, electronic communication devices, low-tech devices and aides, preferential seating, use of a calculator, peer tutoring, and computer programs to assist with specific skills. (*Statewide IEP, Section III*)
- B. Program Modifications and Supports:** Describes modifications and supports needed to help the student advance toward annual goals, be involved in the general curriculum, participate in extracurricular and non-academic activities, and be instructed with other students, with and without disabilities. Examples include, but are not limited to, adapted assignments, specialized classroom seating, testing modifications, staff training, physical modifications of the classroom, and individual assistance as determined by the IEP team. (*Statewide IEP, Section III*)
- C. Transition Services:** States goals and services that must be included in the IEP beginning no later than the first IEP to be in effect when the student turns 14 years of age and updated annually thereafter. The IEP must include:
- Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills.
  - Transition services, including courses of study, that are needed to assist the student in reaching postsecondary goals. (*Statewide IEP, Section III*)
- D. Measurable Goals:** Identifies annual goals for the student and includes short-term instructional objectives related to meeting the student's needs and enabling the student to participate in the general curriculum, whenever possible. Criteria and procedures for evaluating progress are also included as a way for the IEP team members to track the student's progress toward achieving goals. (*Statewide IEP, Section IV*)

- A. Method for Informing Parents of Student Progress:** States how parents will be informed of the student’s progress, and the extent to which that progress is sufficient to enable the student to meet annual goals. (*Statewide IEP, Section IV*)
- B. Determination of Services:** Specifies dates for the initiation, frequency, and duration of services, and a projected date for review of the student’s progress toward annual goals. (*Statewide IEP, Section V*)
- C. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** If services are to be delivered anywhere other than the regular classroom, the following question must be answered: **“During how much of the school day will the student be educated separately from non-disabled peers or not participating in extra-curricular and other non-academic activities such as clubs and lunch?”** (*Statewide IEP, Section VI*)





## Gathering the Tools and Getting to Work: The IEP Development Process

### How the IEP Team Prepares to Develop the IEP

Preparing for an IEP team meeting requires effective communication tools, as well as notes and progress reports. Each IEP team member must come prepared to hammer home ideas and nail down plans for helping the student reach individualized education goals. Each team member must come prepared with the essentials listed below.

- **Respect for Others, Creativity and Flexibility:** All members of the IEP team may not agree on every issue. Come prepared to listen. Remember that collaboration is the essence of the IEP process. Be prepared to look at all programming aspects and understand there may be more than one way to reach a goal.
- **Reasonable Expectations:** Federal regulations call for providing every student with a free appropriate public education (FAPE), and not necessarily “maximum” benefit. Consider what the student needs to reasonably achieve recommended goals and objectives and make meaningful educational progress.
- **Patience and Tolerance:** Some IEP issues may be difficult. As IEP team members express their thoughts and recommendations, remember that the message is as important as the way it is delivered. Be honest, patient, and thoughtful. Encourage open communication.
- **Commitment to Working Together:** The IEP should represent the contributions of all team members. Listen to each member so that the written IEP clearly expresses which services the student will receive.
- **Ability to Focus on the Student’s Needs:** Remember that an *individualized* education program is being developed. Design a program that fits the student, instead of fitting the student to an existing program.

- **Clear Communication:** Limit the use of jargon and terms that may not be understood by the entire IEP team. Explain terms or acronyms that may be unfamiliar.
- **Knowledge of Your Role as an IEP Team Member:** Understand your importance to the IEP team and be prepared to answer questions about how your contributions may impact the team's decisions.



## Tips for Parents

1. **Be prepared to describe your child.** You know your child best. Tell the IEP team what you think your child is capable of doing now, and what you see your child doing in the future.
2. **Bring someone who knows your child.** If you wish to request the presence of someone who tested your child or whose input you feel may be helpful, tell the team leader before the meeting. If the person is available, they may attend. You may also bring a friend or advocate who knows your child.
3. **Stay focused on your child's needs.** Stick to matters that relate to your child's educational needs and development of your child's IEP.
4. **Write down your questions and comments.** Bring them with you.
5. **Use other IEP team members as resources** for you and your child.
6. **Understand your options about attending the IEP meeting.** If you are unable to attend an IEP meeting, other methods, such as video conferencing or teleconference calling, can be used to ensure your participation. In addition, for any IEP meeting other than the annual IEP meeting, you and your local school system can agree not to convene an IEP meeting and instead develop a written document to amend or modify your child's IEP.
7. **Parent consent is required in order to initiate special education and related services.** However, a parent's signature is **not** required for changes or subsequent IEPs. A school system may request your signature to indicate your attendance at an IEP meeting.

## Important Questions to Answer During the IEP Meeting

Now that everyone understands the IEP and has prepared for the IEP team meeting, it's time to gather members and get to work building the IEP. The following questions should be answered as part of the IEP development process.

1. **Where is the student headed?** The IEP team chairperson may refer to this as “setting the purpose.” The student is introduced to the team by descriptions provided by parents, teachers, and others. Understanding the student’s experiences and skill levels allows for realistic long-term goal setting later in the process.
2. **Where is the student now?** Discussion should focus on the student’s strengths. Data is introduced to identify specific areas in which the student is not progressing in the same manner as peers who are non-disabled. Data comes from assessments, school staff observations, and parents. Knowing the student’s strengths enables the IEP team to determine how the student can participate in the general curriculum and related activities.
3. **How is the student progressing?** The goals and benchmarks for progress are determined by examining how the student learns, what the student needs to learn, and what special accommodations are needed. Data and observations from professionals who have instructed the student in the past, as well as assessment information, help the IEP team set reasonable goals to be accomplished within 12 months.
4. **What does the student need?** Specially-designed instruction for participation in general curriculum activities is discussed here. The IEP must identify additional needs and services to be addressed through special education and related services.
5. **What are the parents’ concerns?** Parents can provide important information to help the team better understand the student. The team chairperson should ask parents about their concerns and observations of their child’s behavior, attention to tasks, and ability to relate to others.

6. **How will the student reach education goals?** The IEP team must consider data, annual goals, and the student’s strengths and needs, then carefully craft an IEP description. Whenever possible, the IEP should call for the student to be instructed in a way that allows participation in the general curriculum and in settings with non-disabled students.
7. **How will the team know the student has met the education goals outlined in the IEP?** The IEP must be written in a format that enables the team to recognize when outcomes have or have not been achieved.

8. **If the student is turning 14, what is the plan for transition?** Federal and State regulations require additional planning as students reach age 14.

Whether the student will receive a Maryland High School Diploma or Certificate, consideration must be given to preparing the student for life beyond the secondary school level.

Transition specialists, counselors, adult service providers, and employers, may assist the IEP team in making decisions.



## Checklists To Use Before, During, and After The IEP Team Meeting

### Parent Checklist

1. \_\_\_ I received written notice of the scheduled IEP meeting at least 10 days in advance.
2. \_\_\_ I was given alternate ways to participate in the IEP meeting even though I was not able to physically attend the meeting.
3. \_\_\_ The IEP team included appropriate personnel with the expertise and authority to offer input and make decisions regarding my child's individual needs.
4. \_\_\_ Procedural safeguards were explained to me.
5. \_\_\_ I provided written permission for the initial assessments.
6. \_\_\_ Assessment reports were reviewed with me.
7. \_\_\_ I shared information about my child and stated my expectations.
8. \_\_\_ The team considered my recommendations.
9. \_\_\_ The team discussed my child's participation in Statewide assessments.
10. \_\_\_ The IEP includes modifications and accommodations that my child needs.
11. \_\_\_ Transition from early childhood to school-age special education is in place.
12. \_\_\_ The need for extended school-year services (ESY) was considered.
13. \_\_\_ My child's physical education needs were considered.
14. \_\_\_ My child's transportation needs were considered.
15. \_\_\_ Transition services for students ages 14 years and older were discussed.
16. \_\_\_ I asked the IEP team to consider my independent evaluations, if I had them done.
17. \_\_\_ The IEP team considered my need for training.
18. \_\_\_ I received a copy of my child's IEP and have reviewed it.
19. \_\_\_ I was given information about local Family Support Services–Preschool Partners and/or Partners for Success Centers.
20. \_\_\_ I have provided written permission for the initiation of services.

## Student Checklist

1. \_\_\_ I understand the IEP and the purpose of the IEP team and IEP team meeting.
2. \_\_\_ I have been invited to attend the meeting, if appropriate.
3. \_\_\_ At the meeting, all team members were introduced to me.
4. \_\_\_ My assessment results were explained to me.
5. \_\_\_ All of my questions were heard and answered.
6. \_\_\_ I know what comes next.

## Chairperson's Checklist

1. \_\_\_ All IEP team members, including the student's parents, were given written notification of the meeting date, time, and purpose, at least 10 days in advance.
2. \_\_\_ All team members were provided copies of appropriate reports and data.
3. \_\_\_ Procedural safeguards were explained to the parents.
4. \_\_\_ All IEP team members were introduced at the meeting.
5. \_\_\_ Assessments were presented and reviewed.
6. \_\_\_ Further assessments have been identified, if needed.
7. \_\_\_ Communication needs and behavioral interventions have been considered.
8. \_\_\_ Assistive technology devices and services have been considered.
9. \_\_\_ IEP team members have been designated for follow-up activities.

## Team Checklist

1. \_\_\_ The purpose of the meeting was clearly stated.
2. \_\_\_ All necessary reports were submitted.
3. \_\_\_ Assessment reports have been discussed.
4. \_\_\_ Recommendations were based on evaluations and observations of the student.
5. \_\_\_ The necessary follow-up activities have been identified.



## Adding the Finishing Touches and Moving In: Implementing & Reviewing the IEP

### Putting The IEP Into Action

Good work team! The IEP has been developed. Responsibilities have been determined. Communication with teachers has been arranged and working relationships are being built. Use the checklist below to help make sure the IEP has a solid foundation as everyone begins working toward stated goals and objectives.

### IEP Implementation Checklist

1. \_\_\_ The IEP has been shared and discussed with the appropriate staff members and service providers.
2. \_\_\_ Instruction focuses on the student's strengths and needs.
3. \_\_\_ Instruction reflects stated IEP goals and objectives.
4. \_\_\_ Identified modifications and accommodations are being provided.
5. \_\_\_ A designated IEP team member is monitoring the student's progress.
6. \_\_\_ Designated IEP team members are communicating frequently with parents and addressing parental concerns.



## Don't Let Things Fall Apart

Maintenance is an important part of the IEP process and continuous collaboration among families, administrators, teachers, and related service providers can help ensure student success. IEP team members may request a meeting to review the IEP at any time during the school year. However, the student's IEP **must absolutely** be reviewed at least once a year to ensure that the student is progressing toward his or her stated goals. All IEP members should use the checklist below to help make sure the IEP's foundation remains solid. Based on the student's progress, changes may be necessary. Monitoring by designated team members will help ensure continued appropriateness of the IEP.

### IEP Review Checklist

1. \_\_\_ All IEP team members, including the student, have received written notification of the scheduled IEP review meeting.
2. \_\_\_ The student's present levels of performance have remained the focus in developing, implementing, and reviewing the IEP.
3. \_\_\_ New information about the student's performance in school, at home, and in the community has been considered.
4. \_\_\_ Progress has been made toward each of the student's IEP goals and objectives. If not, this is being addressed by the IEP team.
5. \_\_\_ Appropriate modifications and accommodations have been reviewed and discussed.
6. \_\_\_ The need for extended school year services has been discussed.
7. \_\_\_ Transition goals and needs have been discussed, as appropriate.
8. \_\_\_ The educational placement of the student has been reviewed to ensure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, the student is being educated with peers who are non-disabled.

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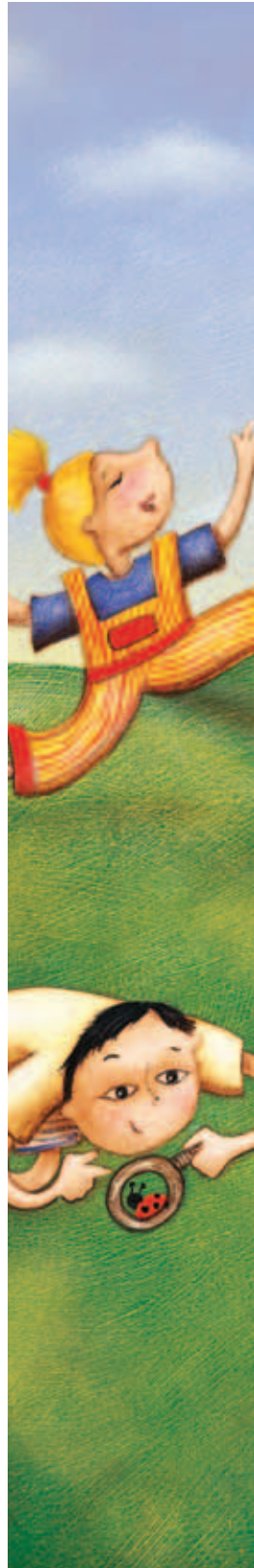
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