



Preparing Parents and Students for Effective IEP Meetings

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Key References available on the Michigan government website

Michigan Department of Education: www.michigan.gov/mde

Click on "Offices"

Click on "Special Education"

Click on "Administrative Forms, Guidelines & Procedures"

Scroll down to "**Individualized Education Program Manual** (July 28, 2005)" and click on that. This document also includes information on **Manifestation Determination** and **Interim Alternative Educational Settings**.

Other useful documents on this page include:

Due process request model form

Special education model complaint form

Model IEP/IFSP forms (with and without transition section)

To find laws:

Michigan Department of Education: www.michigan.gov/mde

Click on "School Administration"

Click on "Special Education"

Click on "Laws and Policies"

Federal Law:

IDEA 2004 (basic special education law)

IDEA Regulations (detailed regulations derived from IDEA 2004)

Regulations for Section 504

Regulations for FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act)

State Law:

Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education (MARSE)

Due Process Procedures

Michigan School Code (PA 451)

Useful websites for guidance on writing IEPs (goals, services, supports, accommodations)

www.wrightslaw.com (a gold mine of information, documents, sample letters, and other useful information for parents, but from a somewhat legalistic perspective)

www.reedmartin.com (similar to Wrightslaw in many ways – also a legal perspective, somewhat different format and emphasis)

www.studentadvocacycenter.org (an Ann Arbor based advocacy center that offers on-line sample letters and other parent advice tailored to Michigan)

www.resa.net/adhd (part of a website maintained by Wayne RESA, but not easily accessible from the home page – discussion of Section 504 and ideas for accommodations that may be useful for many students with behavioral issues and/or learning disabilities)

www.ldonline.org (a huge website with tons of useful information for parents of kids with LD and AD(H)D, but also with other issues)

www.bipolarchild.com/iep.html (model IEP, excerpted from a book on bipolar children)

www.angelfire.com/ny/Debsimms/education.html#ideas (resources on special education, IEPs, idea, inclusion, and section 504)

www.center4familydevelop.com/help-teach-bipolar.htm (suggestions for teachers of students with bipolar disorder)

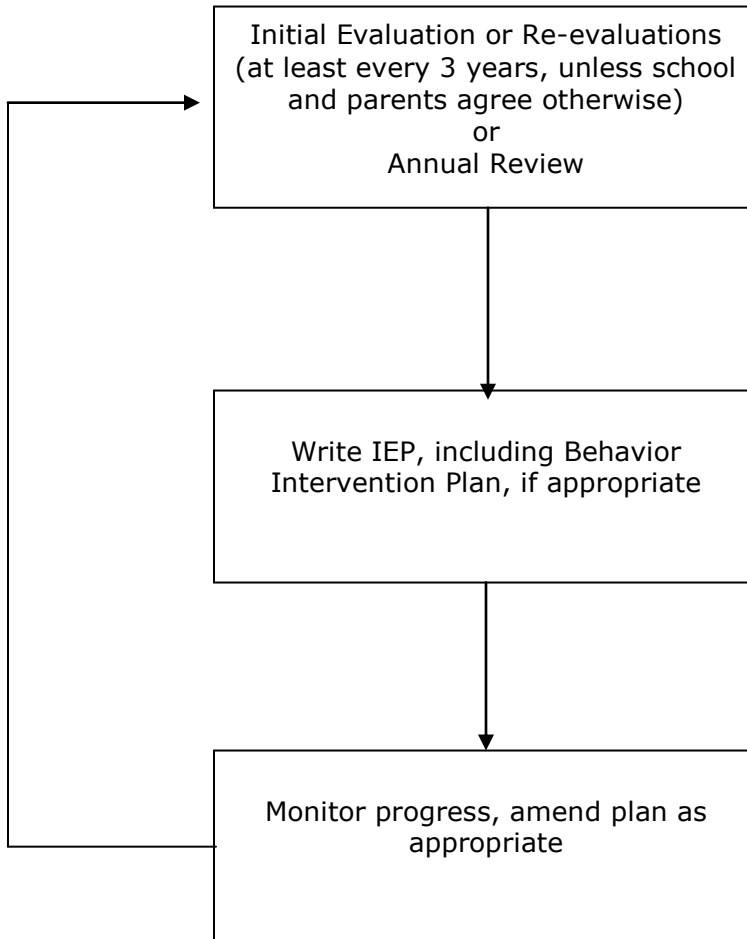
www.udel.edu/bkirby/asperger/ (extensive site on Asperger's – many ideas also relevant to students with ADHD, Nonverbal Learning Disability, Bipolar Disorder, and other issues)

pages.zdnet.com/ourorhskids/ (information on learning disabilities (ld), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (adhd), attention deficit disorder (add), dyslexia, tourettes, processing disorders, autism and asperger's syndrome, bipolar disorder, and gifted and talented)

A framework for Thinking about the IEP process

- I. Special Education is a service, not a place.
- II. FAPE means “free and appropriate public education”.
- III. LRE means “least restrictive environment”.
 - A. This is based on assumption on a single continuum from least restrictive (general education classroom) to most restrictive (hospital/prison).
 - B. The law says that the team starts with the least restrictive placement (general education).
 1. What supports and services would be needed there?
 2. Can FAPE be achieved?
- IV. If FAPE not possible, then you move down one notch on the continuum and ask the same questions.
- V. In theory, eligibility labels simply establish the right to an IEP, but do not determine placement.
- VI. For all students served under the IDEA, an IEP meeting must be held annually.
 - A. Students who will take the standard assessments (e.g., MEAP) with no accommodations or standard accommodations need IEPs with measurable goals. Short-term objectives or benchmarks are no longer required.
 - B. Students who will take the standard assessments with nonstandard accommodations or will take alternate assessments (e.g., MI Access) must have at least two measurable short-term objectives for each goal.
- VII. Parents must receive reports on progress toward IEP goals at least as frequently as general education students receive progress reports.
- VIII. The basic IEP cycle has three parts:
 - A. Evaluate strengths, needs, and progress to date
 - B. Write an annual plan
 - C. Implement the plan and monitor progress
- IX. For best results, parents need to be involved throughout the process –
- X. Parents are the only quality control monitors for the process!**

The Basic IEP Process



Key Elements of an IEP

- I. Constituting the IEP Team
- II. Determining eligibility
- III. Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) statement and Transition Goals and Service Needs
- IV. Supplementary Aids/Services/Personnel Support
- V. Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives
- VI. Special Education Programs / Related Services
- VII. State and District-wide Assessment
- VIII. Commitment Signatures

Key Areas for Parent/Student Preparation

- I. ***Get your paperwork in order***
 - A. Review all reports and make sure you have everything you should have
 1. Progress reports and report cards
 2. Notes from school staff (and notes you sent to school staff)
 3. Last IEP and most recent evaluation reports
 4. Relevant reports from other sources (physicians, counselors, religious school teachers, etc.)
 5. Work far enough in advance that you have time to request missing documents.
 - B. Take steps to get input from your child, whether or not s/he will be attending the meeting.
 1. Use written notes to make sure you don't forget anything
 2. Collect the input over time, at opportune moments.
 - C. Request copies in advance of any reports that will be presented at the meeting.
 - D. Request reports from an "outsiders" that you may want to include – have them sent to you, not the school.

II. **Talk things over with your child, family, and other relevant parties (siblings, friends, religious school teachers, etc.)**

- A. Get answers to the post-secondary goals questions (required if student is 16 or older, or will turn 16 during the next year, and advisable for younger students if the questions are at all appropriate).
- B. Contact any agencies you expect to list in the transition services section (required for students who will be 16 or older during the coming year) and see whether it would be useful and possible to have a representative attend the meeting.
- C. Complete student forms:
 - 1. Things that I feel will help me be successful
 - 2. Things that I would like to change
- D. Complete parent form: Things that I feel will help my child succeed

III. **Create your own paperwork**

- A. Write a **Parent Report** and send it ahead of time to the people who will be attending the meeting.
 - 1. Use a team member's report as a model, if there is one you like.
 - 2. Include a paragraph that describes your child as you see him/her.
 - 3. Evaluate progress and changes since the last IEP or over the current school year.
 - 4. List priority concerns
 - 5. List goal ideas or areas where goals are needed
- B. Draft a **Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) statement**.
 - 1. Make sure that all items listed in the transition goals are reflected in items in the PLAAFP.
 - 2. For every item in the PLAAFP, draft **goals** that are relevant for that topic – if you can't word a draft goal, at least list the areas where goals are needed.
- C. If your child wants to do it, have him/her write a **Student Report**.

D. Think about, and draft if you want to, ***short-term objectives or benchmarks*** for each goal.

IV. **Delineate needed supports/services/accommodations/modifications**

A. Think about your child's involvement in the general curriculum.

1. Think about accommodations that would enhance the involvement.
2. Think about supports and services that would enhance the involvement.
3. Think about your child's involvement in the social fabric of the school, both in and out of classes – again, think about supports and services that would enhance involvement.
4. Record your ideas and concerns.

B. Think about placement

1. Pros and cons of self-contained settings
2. Learn about specific placement options
 - (1) Gather information
 - (2) Visit/observe

C. If your child may benefit from a ***positive behavior support plan***, begin outlining one.

1. Get input from your child about what might be effective for him/her.
2. Record situations that tend to trigger problem behavior and think about how triggers could be avoided or mitigated.
3. Think about what your child needs to learn in order to manage his/her behavior.
4. Think about how the school staff could help teach your child what he needs to learn.

Try to finish all the preparation at least a week ahead of time to reduce your stress as you go into the meeting.

V. **Pre-IEP meetings**

- A. It is good to have met all the IEP participants before the formal meeting. If meetings in person are not feasible, at least have a social exchange via telephone or email.
 - 1. The purpose is to have a social relationship with each team member – this makes it less likely that disagreements will become adversarial, and less likely that there will be attempts to intimidate you.
 - 2. If you have a good working relationship, use pre-IEP meetings to share updates and talk about priorities, draft goals, PLAAPF, and so forth.
 - 3. Do not let these pre-IEP meetings and conversations become adversarial.
- B. Pre-IEP meetings have to be scheduled at the convenience of the staff.
- C. Be sure to have some pre-IEP conversation with all people who have relevant knowledge but will not be at the meeting.
- D. Let the IEP coordinator know ahead of time that you do not plan to sign the IEP at the meeting – you will take it home and mull it over, no matter how excellent it is.
 - 1. If possible, make a plan ahead of time for how to handle any questions you may have.
 - 2. If possible, make a plan for getting a complete copy of the IEP, with signature page signed by district representative, as well as for returning it.

VI. The IEP meeting

- A. Pay attention to social dynamics
- B. Try to make sure setting is appropriate (comfortable, enough space, private, good sight lines)
- C. Go in with reasonable expectations
- D. Leave room for people to save face, change their minds, and so forth

Completing the IEP Form

Section 1: Title Page, Student Information, IEP Participants

- I. Sign in: the first step at every IEP Team meeting is having each team member sign in. **This signature just represents attendance**, not agreement with anything in the plan.
- II. Cover page: Make sure the information on the cover page is correct.
- III. Age of majority

Section 2: Eligibility

- IV. Disability categories
 - A. Broad categories set by federal law.
 - B. Criteria defining the categories are set by states, within federal regulation guidelines.
 - C. **In theory, it does not matter much which category is selected**
 1. Once eligibility is established, the plan is constructed from the transition plan and the PLAAPF
 2. All areas where school participation and mastery of the general curriculum warrant attention should be referenced in the PLAAPF
 3. There is no necessity for secondary disability listings, although it can be useful to have one
 4. In practice, there is a tendency on the part of both school staff and parents to match students to placements and plans based on disability category

Section 3: Needs for Learning and Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance, Course of Study, Transition Service Needs

- V. **Listing of factors to be considered.**
 - A. Consult the checklist when doing your preparatory work.
 - B. Do not allow school staff to check off items that have not, in fact, been discussed.
 - C. Make sure anything discussed that you want included in the IEP record is recorded somewhere on the IEP form.

D. Beware of statements that begin "Parent stated..." – they do not imply agreement by the school!

VI. **Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance**

- A. Formerly called the "PLEP" or "PLOP": "Present Level of [Educational] Performance"
- B. The state manual provides examples that are far more detailed than what schools usually want to include – use the manual to insist on detail and specificity
- C. Every issue raised in the PLAAFP must map to an annual goal, and vice versa.
 - 1. Insist on writing the PLAAFP before writing goals
 - 2. Make sure every area of concern on your list is reflected somehow in the PLAAFP.
- D. If you can't get a concern into the PLAAFP, make sure it is recorded in comments, and that it is clear you wanted it in the PLAAFP
- E. While evaluation results can be part of the PLAAFP, they must reflect actual school performance, not just test scores.
- F. The space allotted on the form is almost always too small for an adequate PLAAFP.
 - 1. An extra page can be inserted, or
 - 2. A PLAAFP attachment can be written and referenced (e.g., "See Attachment A")

VII. **Student's Post-Secondary Goals**

- A. This should reflect discussions with your child held well before the meeting.
- B. If your child does not want to attend the meeting (or you do not want him/her there), have notes from that discussion with you.
- C. Sometimes it is useful to have someone other than the parent talk this section over with the child:
 - 1. Trusted friend/mentor
 - 2. Trusted school counselor or other staff member
 - 3. Therapist

Items included on the IEP Form

Factors to Consider in Order to Provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

<p>Consider (check) each of the following and comment as appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> strengths of the student <input type="checkbox"/> parent input and concerns for enhancing the education of the student <input type="checkbox"/> results of an initial evaluation or the most recent reevaluation of the student <input type="checkbox"/> progress on the current IEP annual goals and objectives <input type="checkbox"/> student's anticipated needs or other matters <p>Comments:</p>	<p>Consider (check) each of the following. Needs in any of the following require a statement in the comments below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> communication needs of the student <input type="checkbox"/> positive behavior intervention, supports, and strategies for students whose behavior impedes learning <input type="checkbox"/> language needs for students with limited English proficiency <input type="checkbox"/> Braille instruction for students who are blind or visually impaired <input type="checkbox"/> communication and language for students who are deaf or hearing impaired <input type="checkbox"/> the need for assistive technology devices or services <p>Comments:</p>
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Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance – Specify the Student Needs for Learning

What is the student's level of functioning, and how does the disability affect his/her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (or participation in appropriate activities for preschool children)?

Student's Post-Secondary Goals

If student did not attend the IEP, describe the steps that were taken to ensure consideration of the student's preferences and goals:

34 CFR §300.344(b) requires the school to invite students to participate in IEP Team meetings if the meeting will include consideration of transition needs or services.

1) Adult Living: As an adult, where do you want to live?
2) Career/Employment: As an adult, what kind of work do you want to do?
3) Community Participation: As an adult, what hobbies and activities do you want to have?
4) Post-secondary education/training: After high school, what additional education and training do you want?

Statement of Needed Transition Services – Include by age 16 (Required)

(Recommended to consider beginning at age 13 and annually thereafter if determined by the IEP team.)

Needed Transition Activities/Services Related to Student PLAAFP (describe the responsibilities of each participant)	Assessment	Responsible Agency/Person	Timeline (optional)
ADULT LIVING Considered, none needed <input type="checkbox"/>			
DAILY LIVING SKILLS Considered, none needed <input type="checkbox"/>			
FUNCTIONAL VOCATIONAL EVALUATION Considered, none needed <input type="checkbox"/>			
EMPLOYMENT Considered, none needed <input type="checkbox"/>			
COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES Considered, none needed <input type="checkbox"/>			
RELATED SERVICES Considered, none needed <input type="checkbox"/>			
FURTHER EDUCATION Considered, none needed <input type="checkbox"/>			
OTHER Considered, none needed <input type="checkbox"/>			

Was there a need to invite a community agency representative likely to provide current or future services?

Yes No

If yes, did the community agency representative attend the IEP? Yes No Explain: _____

Please list any additional steps taken to ensure that the student has made connections with any appropriate outside programs and services: _____

Least Restrictive Environment – This student will:

Fully participate with students who are nondisabled in the general education setting except for the time spent in separate special education programs/services provided outside of the general education classroom as specified in this IEP.

Yes No (explain):

Be fully involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum.

Yes No (explain):

Have the same opportunity as general education students to participate in nonacademic and extracurricular activities.

Yes No (explain):

Section 6: Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives

Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives							
Data Used to Determine Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance:							

Annual Goal: _____							
Short-Term Objectives (at least two per goal)			Evaluation	Criterion	Schedule		
1.							
2.							
3.							
Date	Status Obj. 1	Status Obj. 2	Status Obj. 3	Comments/Data On Progress			
Evaluation S Student's Daily Work D Documented Observation R Rating Scale T Standardized Test O Other (specify above)		Criterion ____% Accuracy __of__ Rate ____ Achievement Level Other (specify above)		Schedule W Weekly D Daily M Monthly G Grading Period O Other (specify above)		Status of Progress on Objectives 1 Achieved/Maintained 2 Progressing at a rate sufficient to meet the annual goal for this objective 3 Progressing below a rate sufficient to meet the annual goal for this objective (explain above) 4 Not applicable during this reporting period 5 Other (specify above)	

Reporting Progress: <input type="checkbox"/> The parents will be regularly informed in writing of progress on goals and objectives of this IEP. How: _____ When: _____
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VIII. Statement of Need Transition Services

- A. If you anticipate agency involvement in your child's life (or there already is such involvement), plan ahead to make sure an appropriate agency representative will attend the meeting.
- B. *Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the student is 16, 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 and the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the student in reaching those goals (state IEP manual)*
- C. *Recommended to consider beginning at age 13 (or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team), the **IEP may include a statement of transition service needs focusing on a course of study that is updated at least annually.** This statement focuses on the student's courses of study (such as participation in advanced placement courses or a vocational education program). The IEP may determine what instruction and educational experiences will assist the student to prepare for transition from secondary education to post-secondary life.*
- D. There are various school staff who should be helping with this section – ask them to participate in your preparations.
 1. Guidance counselor
 2. Social worker
 3. Case load teacher or teacher-consultant
 4. Work study coordinator
 5. Teacher
 6. If you want assessments or information from other agencies, work well in advance of the IEP date to line up what is needed – use people listed above as appropriate.

Section 4: Least Restrictive Environment

- IX. ***The law favors placement in the general education settings with needed supports/services unless FAPE cannot be achieved in that setting.***
 - A. "Special education is a service, not a place."
 - B. General education teachers often need support themselves – make sure that support is written into the IEP.

- X. ***A key requirement of the IDEA is maximizing "access to the general curriculum"***
 - A. Make sure that accommodations/modifications are in place as necessary to insure genuine access.
 - B. Make sure that pull-outs are scheduled to support access, not to impede it.

Section 5: Supplementary Aids and Services

- XI. *"Aids, services, program modifications, and/or supports for school personnel, based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable, that are provided in general education classes or other education-related settings to enable students with disabilities to be educated with students who are nondisabled."*
- XII. *"May include peer tutoring, interpreters, and paraprofessional personnel, as well as any other instructional support provided in conjunction with general education."*
- XIII. *"May also include calculators, tapes, tape recorders, notes, and other technology devices and services."*
- XIV. *"May be provided either through general education or special education."*
- XV. Make sure all needed aids/services are listed, even if you are told, "Oh, we do that for all our students."
- XVI. *"It is permissible to write 'as needed' as long as a description is included of the conditions under which the supplementary aid/service/support will be provided."*

Section 6: Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives

- XVII. ***Annual goals should map to PLAAFP and Transition Plan – do those first!***
 - A. Every item in the PLAAFP should map to at least one annual goal.
 - B. Every annual goal should map back to an item in the PLAAFP.
 - C. If a student has a transition plan with transition goals, then every goal in the transition plan should map to an annual goal.
 - D. PLAAFP and transition goals can map to the same annual goal.

- XVIII. Goals should be categorized by PLAAFP priorities, not by staff member titles. (E.g. there should not be "OT goals" or "social work goals", but instead "fine motor skills goals" or "social skills goals".)
- XIX. Federal law no longer requires short-term objectives for students taking standard assessments – Michigan procedures do not yet reflect that change.
- XX. The IDEA requires that annual goals relate to
- A. Meeting student needs that result from the disability to enable the student to be involved in and make progress in the general curriculum, or
 - B. Meeting each of the student's other educational and transition needs that result from the student's disability.
- XXI. ***"There is a strong emphasis in the IDEA on linking the educational program of students with disabilities to the general education curriculum."***
- A. Goals are not needed in areas where the disability does not affect ability to progress in the general curriculum, that is, you don't need a "math goal" if the disability has no impact on the student's ability to master the general curriculum in math, using the general curriculum's approaches and requirements.
 - B. If a student needs only modifications or accommodations in an area of the curriculum, you do not need a goal in that area.
 - C. Accommodations and modifications "need to be" specified elsewhere on the IEP form.
 - D. Reference to the Michigan Curriculum Framework for the development of annual goals and short-term objectives is encouraged.
- XXII. Under federal law, short-term objectives are no longer necessary for students taking standard assessment, but they are not prohibited.
- A. If there are no short-term objectives, the annual goal itself must be objectively measurable.
 - B. Each short-term objective should be achievable within a shorter period of time than the annual goal.
 - C. If there are short-term objectives, there must be at least two for each goal – this is a minimum, not a maximum.

XXIII. Means and schedule for reporting progress must be agreed upon and recorded in the IEP.

- A. At a minimum, reporting has to be on the same schedule as progress reporting for general education students.
- B. More frequent reporting can be specified in terms of medium, frequency, and timing.
- C. Other forms of home-school communication should be specified somewhere on the IEP form.

Section 7: Special Education Programs and Related Services

XXIV. Teacher endorsements

- A. It is not necessarily true that an endorsement implies competence, or that lack of endorsement implies incompetence
- B. Make sure the decision about endorsement is based on student need, not district convenience.
- C. It may be reasonable to provide a teacher-consultant to support a special education teacher who does not have the "right" endorsement or knowledge/experience.

XXV. Special Education Programs

- A. Characteristics of self-contained school programs are defined by the State Administrative Rules, not federal law.
- B. The form records the rule pertaining to the specific program and the amount of time to be spent in the program.
- C. For related services, frequency and duration must be specified for each service.
 - 1. Make sure duration fits the needs of the child, not the budget or convenience of the district.
 - 2. Services can be direct, consultative, or a combination of the two.

XXVI. Extended School Year

- A. Cannot be tied to disability category.
- B. Most frequently provided using regression/recoupement, but other criteria are possible.
- C. If you are looking for ESY and expect any difficult, start early – February at the very latest.
- D. ESY options must be determined based on individual need.

XXVII. Special Transportation

- A. Students with IEPs must receive transportation services if needed to implement the IEP and achieve FAPE.
 - 1. Accommodations/supports on the bus must be specified in the IEP.
 - 2. It is often worthwhile to build a relationship with the Director of Transportation in your district, rather than using school-based staff as liaisons.
- B. Transportation can include mileage reimbursements, taxi fare, and so forth – the nature of the service is an IEP Team decision.

Section 8: State and District-wide Assessment

XXVIII. Standard versus Alternate Assessment

XXIX. Standard versus Non-standard Accommodations

Section 9: Commitment Signatures

XXX. Completed IEP requires signatures from

- A. Resident District representative (unless the designee is the Operating District)
- B. Operating District representative (if placement is outside resident district)
- C. Parent

XXXI. Each party chooses the appropriate check offs.

XXXII. Parent check off choices are

- A. Agree and want implementation
- B. Disagree but will allow implementation
- C. Disagree and want
 - 1. Mediation, or
 - 2. Due process

XXXIII. If a parent simply does not sign, the will of the other signatories takes ***effect, usually meaning implementation of the IEP.***

- A. Never sign the IEP at the meeting. Take it home, with other parties having signed, and
 - 1. Review carefully

2. Contact IEP coordinator if errors are found – handle according to instructions.
 3. Decide which check off applies.
 4. Check and sign.
 5. Initial, number, and date all pages.
 6. Make a copy for your records.
 7. Return the original to the IEP coordinator.
- B. It is a good idea to let the team, or at least the coordinator, before the meeting that you will be taking the IEP home to for a final review before signing.
- C. Do not allow yourself to be pressured into signing at the meeting.
- D. Do not just leave the IEP unsigned.

Things that I feel will help my child succeed
(parent preparation tool)

Academically

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Socially

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

In co-curricular and extracurricular activities

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Other

- 1
- 2.

Things that I feel will help me be successful
(student preparation tool)

To learn what the teacher is trying to teach me

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

To feel good about being in school/class

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

To avoid getting into trouble

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Things that teachers have done that have been good for me
(student preparation tool)

- 1.**
- 2.**
- 3.**
- 4.**
- 5.**

Things I wish teachers wouldn't do, and what they should do instead

- 1A.**
- 1B.**

- 2A.**
- 2B.**

- 3A.**
- 3B.**

Things I would like to change (that have to do with school)

- 1.**
- 2.**
- 3.**
- 4.**
- 5.**

PARENT REPORT

Name:

Date:

School (and program, if applicable):

Background

[Provide a brief description of your child's general situation, apart from the school program itself.]

Review of progress since last parent report

Goals and Priorities for the Coming Year

Concerns that Need to be Addressed by the IEP Team