



NASET Q & A Corner

Issue #9

Questions and Answers About Individualized Education Programs (IEP)

What is an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

An IEP is a written statement for a student with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised in a meeting(s) of a Committee on Special Education (CSE), Subcommittee on Special Education or Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE). The IEP is the tool that ensures a student with a disability has access to the general education curriculum and is provided the appropriate learning opportunities, accommodations, adaptations, specialized services and supports needed for the student to progress towards achieving the learning standards and to meet his or her unique needs related to the disability.

Each student with a disability must have an IEP in effect by the beginning of each school year. Federal and State laws and regulations specify the information that must be documented in each student's IEP, including the classification of the disability of the student, a description of the student's unique needs, the student's goals for the school year and the special education services that will be provided to the student in the least restrictive environment.

What is the Purpose of an IEP?

The individualized education program is a written record of the decisions reached by the team members at the IEP meeting. The IEP serves many purposes:

- a.** The individualized education program (IEP) is the heart of IDEA 2004. It is a written statement that is developed, reviewed, and revised in an IEP meeting and serves as a communication vehicle between a parent/guardian and the District.
- b.** The IEP meeting serves as a communication vehicle between parent/guardians and school personnel, and enables them, as equal participants, to jointly decide what the student's needs are, what services will be provided to meet those needs, and what the anticipated outcomes may be.
- c.** The IEP process provides an opportunity for resolving any differences between the parent/guardians and the agency concerning the special education needs of a student with

a disability: first, through the IEP meeting, and second, if necessary, through the procedural protections that are available to the parent/guardians.

d. The IEP sets forth in writing a commitment of resources necessary to enable a student with a disability to receive needed special education and related services.

e. The IEP is a management tool that is used to ensure that each student with a disability is provided special education and related services appropriate to the student's special learning needs.

f. The IEP is a compliance/monitoring document that may be used by authorized monitoring personnel from each governmental level to determine whether a student with a disability is actually receiving the Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) agreed to by the parent/guardians and the school.

g. The IEP serves as an evaluation device for use in determining the extent of the student's progress toward meeting the projected outcomes.

h. An effective process that engages parent/guardians and school personnel in a meaningful discussion of the student's educational needs must be used in developing the IEP. The completed IEP should be the product of collaboration between parent/guardians and educators who, through full and equal participation, identify the unique needs of a student with a disability and plan the services to meet those needs.

i. The IEP is not a performance contract or a guarantee by the District and the teacher that a student will progress at a specified rate. However, the District must ensure that all services set forth in the student's IEP are provided, and it is also obligated to make good faith efforts to assist the student in achieving his or her IEP goals and objectives.

The IEP can be more than an outline and management tool of the student's special education program. It should be an opportunity for parent/guardians and educators to work together as equal participants to identify the student's needs, what will be provided to meet those needs, and what the anticipated outcomes may be. It is a document that is revised as the needs of the student change. The IEP is a commitment in writing of the resources the school agrees to provide. Also, the periodic review of the IEP serves as an evaluation of the student's progress toward meeting the educational goals and objectives.

Finally, the IEP serves as the focal point for clarifying issues and cooperative decision-making by parent/guardians, the student and school personnel in the best interest of the student. For all of these reasons, the IEP is the cornerstone of special education.

Who Develops the IEP?

An IEP can only be developed or revised by the CSE, Subcommittee on Special Education or CPSE. The Committee is required to include certain individuals who know the student and his or her unique needs and who can commit the resources of the school to address the student's needs.

To develop an appropriate IEP for the student, a group of individuals with the knowledge and expertise about the student, curriculum and resources of the school must come together and the

process for discussion and decision-making needs to be effective and efficient. Information about the student's strengths, interests and unique needs gathered from parent/guardians, teachers, the student, related service providers, evaluations and observations are the foundation upon which to build a program that will result in effective instruction and student achievement. Each member of the multidisciplinary team that makes up the CSE, Subcommittee or CPSE brings information and a unique perspective to the discussion of the student's needs and has an important role and responsibility to contribute to the discussion and the recommendations for the student.

Each Committee has a chairperson who has certain responsibilities under the law and regulations. The chairperson of the CPSE must be the school district representative. The required members of the Committee include the following:

Parent/guardians of the student

The parent/guardians of a student with a disability are expected to be equal participants along with school personnel, in developing, reviewing, and revising the IEP for their student. This is an active role in which the parent/guardians:

- (1) provide critical information regarding the strengths of the student and express their concerns for enhancing the education of their student;
- (2) participate in discussions about the student's need for special education and related services and supplementary aids and services; and (3) join with the other participants in deciding how the student will be involved and progress in the general curriculum and participate in State and district-wide assessments, and what services the agency will provide to the student and in what setting.

Parent/guardians are important team members who can:

- Verify the accuracy of personal identifying information.
- Provide information and observations about the level of the student's functioning in his or her home environment and community.
- Provide information regarding the student's medical status.
- Participate in developing educational goals and objectives based on the present level of academic achievement or functional performance and identified needs.
- Participate in determining the special education and related services to be provided.
- Participate in identifying an appropriate educational program for the student.

Though parent/guardians are expected to be equal partners at the IEP meeting, writing IEPs or participating at IEP meetings is a new experience for many families. Information could be shared with parent/guardians throughout the evaluation process and prior to IEP notification, regarding what will be discussed at the meeting, questions to consider, Transition Questionnaires etc. This would enhance parent/guardians' readiness to share their wishes (i.e., goals) for their student, as well as to contribute to the determination of the student's needs and present levels of performance. Please remember that all information sent to parent/guardians must be in their native language. Districts must arrange for interpreters for parent/guardians when necessary.

Not less than 1 general education teacher of such student (if the student is, or may be, participating in the general education environment)

Very often, general education teachers play a central role in the education of students with disabilities and have important expertise regarding the general curriculum and the general education environment.

Thus, a ... general education teacher...must, to the extent appropriate, participate in the development, review, and revision of the student's IEP, including assisting in (1) the determination of appropriate positive behavioral interventions and strategies for the student; and (2) the determination of supplementary aids and services, program modifications, and supports for school personnel that will be provided for the student.

The teacher need not (depending upon the student's needs and the purpose of the specific IEP team meeting) be required to participate in all decisions made as part of the meeting or to be present throughout the entire meeting or attend every meeting. For example, the general education teacher who is a member of the IEP team must participate in discussions and decisions about how to modify the general curriculum in the regular classroom to ensure the student's involvement and progress in the general curriculum and participation in the general education environment.

Depending upon the specific circumstances, however, it may not be necessary for the general education teacher to participate in discussions and decisions regarding, for example, the physical therapy needs of the student, if the teacher is not responsible for implementing that portion of the student's IEP.

In determining the extent of the general education teacher's participation at IEP meetings, public agencies and parent/guardians should discuss and try to reach agreement on whether the student's general education teacher that is a member of the IEP team should be present at a particular IEP meeting and, if so, for what period of time. The extent to which it would be appropriate for the general education teacher member of the IEP team to participate in IEP meetings must be decided on a case by case basis.

Not less than 1 special education teacher, or where appropriate, not less than 1 special education provider of such student

The special educator on the Team can be either the student's special education teacher, or the student's special education service provider, such as a speech therapist, if the related service is considered specially designed instruction. If the student is being considered for special education for the first time, the role of the special education teacher could be filled by a teacher qualified to provide special education in the student's area of suspected disability. Occupational therapists, physical therapists and guidance counselors cannot fill the role of the special education teacher/service provider on the IEP team since these individuals do not provide specially designed instruction.

In deciding which teacher should participate, the District may wish to consider the following possibilities:

- For a student with a disability who is receiving special education, the "teacher" could be the student's special education teacher. If the student's disability is a speech impairment, the "teacher" could be the speech-language pathologist.
- For a student with a disability who is being considered for placement in special education, the "teacher" could be a teacher qualified to provide education in the type of program in which the student may be placed.

Individual who can interpret the instructional implications of the evaluations

At least one individual must participate in the Committee meeting who can provide information on the results of the student's individual evaluation report and assist the Committee in identifying the implications of those results for the instruction of the student. This individual may be a member of the Committee who is also serving as the general education teacher or special education teacher or related service provider of the student, the school psychologist, the representative of the school district or a person having knowledge or special expertise regarding the student when such member is determined by the school district to have the knowledge and expertise to fulfill this role on the Committee.

School district representative

The school district representative must be someone who is qualified to provide or supervise special education and who is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum and the availability of resources of the district. This individual brings knowledge of the continuum of special education supports and services and should have the authority to commit the resources of the school and to ensure that whatever services are set out in the IEP will be provided. The individual who meets these qualifications may also be the same individual appointed as the special education teacher or related service provider of the student or the school psychologist on the Committee. The chairperson of the CPSE must be the school district representative on the Committee.

Each district may determine the specific staff person who will serve as its representative in a particular IEP meeting, so long as the person meets the following criteria:

- (a) Is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities;
- (b) is knowledgeable about the general curriculum; and
- (c) is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the public agency

Individuals with knowledge or special expertise about the student

In addition to the other required members, parent/guardians and school personnel have discretion to include other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the student. This is important to ensure that the Committee includes the input of those persons that can add to the discussion of the student's needs and recommendations for supports and services. Such individuals could include, for example, a school nurse, a physical therapist or other related service provider, the student's private counselor, a paraprofessional working with the student, a student's athletic coach, family member or family friend who knows the student and who can assist the parent/guardians. The determination of the knowledge or special expertise of any such

individual is made by the party (parent/guardians or school) who invited the individual to be a member of the Committee.

Other agency representatives

- When the purpose of the meeting is to discuss transition services, other agency representatives are invited to discuss their role in supporting the student in school to post-school activities. If an agency invited to send a representative to a meeting does not do so, the district must find other ways to involve the other agency in the planning of any transition services.
- When a student is or may be attending a private school or facility, a representative of that school or facility must be invited to participate in the student's Committee meetings. This is also the case when a student is residing in a facility operated by another State department or agency (e.g., Office of Mental Health, Office of Students and Family Services). If the private school or facility representative cannot attend, the school district must use other methods to ensure participation by the private school or facility, including individual or conference telephone calls.
- Other members of the CPSE include the representative of the municipality and, for certain students when transitioning from early intervention services to the CPSE, a representative of the county's early intervention program.

Whenever appropriate, the student with a disability

If a purpose of an IEP meeting for a student with a disability will be the consideration of the student's transition service needs or needed transition services the school district must invite the student and, as part of the notification to the parent/guardians of the IEP meeting, inform the parent/guardians that the agency will invite the student to the IEP meeting.

If the student does not attend, the school district must take other steps to ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered.

Student participation in the IEP can be a significant step in assisting students to become their own advocates. As students prepare for the move from school to adult life they will need opportunities to practice the skills necessary in situations where self-advocacy will be important.

Naturally, this is not accomplished by simply inviting the student to the IEP meeting. Activities designed to engage the student in the IEP process to be a full participant in the meeting include:

- reviewing assessment information, especially career/vocational assessments, prior to the meeting
- examining academic progress
- participating in long range planning
- establishing post-school goals in employment, education, independent living and community participation
- exploring post high school education & training programs
- researching options available through adult service agencies
- brainstorming strengths & needs
- leading some of the discussion at the IEP meeting.

What Content Must Be Included in a Student's IEP?

Under IDEA 2004, the IEP must address all of a student's identified special education and related services needs based on need, not the disability, and include:

A statement of the student's present level of academic achievement of functional performance.

The IEP team reviews the existing evaluation data on the student, including information and concerns shared by the parent/guardians. The team also reviews any other current pertinent data related to the student's needs and unique characteristics, such as information provided by parent/guardians; progress toward desired post-school outcomes; current classroom-based assessments; the most recent reevaluation; input from the student's special and general education teachers and service providers, and, as appropriate, the results of the student's performance on state-and district-wide assessments.

Statements of present level of academic achievement of functional performance in an area of need include how a student's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for students without disabilities). For preschool students, present levels of performance describe how the disability affects the student's participation in age-appropriate activities. The IEP for every student with a disability, even those in separate classrooms/schools must address how the student will be involved and progress in the general education curriculum. The statement should accurately describe the effect of the student's disability on the student's performance in each area of education that is affected.

A statement of secondary transition service needs and needed transition services for students.

It is crucial for IEP Teams to begin planning for a student's post-school outcomes while the student is still in school. A statement of the transition service needs of the student under the applicable components of the IEP that focus on the student's course of study (such as participation in drivers' education courses, a vocational education program, and/or general education curriculum), must be included in the IEP by the student's 16th birthday, or earlier if determined appropriate by the IEP Team.

Transfer of Rights to Student

The IEP must include a statement that the student has been informed of his or her rights under IDEA 04 that will transfer to the student on reaching the age of majority (age 18) beginning at least one year before the student reaches the age of majority.

Special considerations

Depending on the needs of the student, the IEP team needs to consider what the law calls special factors. These include:

- If the student's behavior interferes with his or her learning or the learning of others, the IEP team will consider strategies and supports to address the student's behavior.
- If the student has limited proficiency in English, the IEP team will consider the student's language needs as these needs relate to his or her IEP.

- If the student is blind or visually impaired, the IEP team must provide for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille, unless it determines after an appropriate evaluation that the student does not need this instruction.
- If the student has communication needs, the IEP team must consider those needs.
- If the student is deaf or hard of hearing, the IEP team will consider his or her language and communication needs. This includes the student's opportunities to communicate directly with classmates and school staff in his or her usual method of communication (for example, sign language).
- The IEP team must always consider the student's need for assistive technology devices or services.

State or district-wide achievement testing

The IEP must include a statement of the accommodations that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the student as well as to participate in state and district-wide assessments. It is expected that all students, including students with disabilities, will participate in the statewide norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments. For district-wide assessments, if the IEP Team determines that the student will not participate in the regular assessments, the IEP must state why that assessment is not appropriate for the student and include a statement of how the student will be assessed.

Progress Toward Goals

The IEP must include a statement of how parent/guardians will be informed of their student's progress toward the annual goals and the extent to which that progress is sufficient to enable the student to achieve the goals by the end of the IEP time period. Parent/guardians of students with disabilities must be informed of progress at least as often as parent/guardians of students without disabilities.

Measurable annual goals including academic, functional goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks

The academic and functional goals should focus on the learning and behavioral problems resulting from the student's disability and be aligned with state and district performance standards. They should address the needs that are summarized in the statement of the student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance. For those students taking alternate assessment, there should be at least one goal, with corresponding objectives or benchmarks, for each area of need.

The goals and objectives or benchmarks provide a mechanism for determining whether the student is progressing in the special education program and the general education curriculum, and whether the placement and services are appropriate to meet the student's identified educational needs (20 USC 1414 d 1 A i II).

Measurable annual goals: A goal is a measurable statement that describes what a student is reasonably expected to accomplish from the specialized educational program during the school year.

Short-term objectives or benchmarks: The short-term objectives or benchmarks derive from the annual goals but represent smaller, more manageable learning tasks a student must master on the way to achieving the goals. The purpose of short-term objectives and benchmarks is to enable families, students, and teachers to monitor progress during the year and, if appropriate, revise the IEP consistent with the student's instructional needs. They describe how far the student is expected to progress toward the annual goal and by when. In most cases, at least two objectives or benchmarks should be written for each annual goal. Progress on each short-term objective or benchmark should be documented.

A statement of program modifications and support for school personnel

The IEP must include program modifications/accommodations for the student and support that will be provided to school personnel to allow the student to:

- Advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals
- Be involved and progress in the general education curriculum and participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities
- Be educated and participate with other students with disabilities and non-disabled students

Need for extended school year (ESY)

Consideration of the need for an extended school year (ESY) must be documented. If it is determined that a student requires ESY, it must be included in the IEP. The information used to support the determination should be referenced. ESY is not the same as summer school.

A statement of the specific special education, supplementary aids and services to be provided to the student based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable

The statement of services contained in the IEP must include the following information:

- All the specific special education and related services needed by the student in order to receive an appropriate education (e.g., itinerant program supervision, speech/language pathology services, assistive technology services, transition services, counseling services, physical therapy services).
- Supplementary aids and services, based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable must be provided to the student, or on behalf of the student.
- The total amount of service required by the student per week.
- The frequency of on-site program review by each itinerant service provider.
- The amount and frequency of program supervision by certified special education staff.
- The amount and frequency of counseling services.

Projected starting date and anticipated frequency, duration, and location of services

- The projected starting date and anticipated frequency, duration, and location of services (and modifications) must be indicated for each special education and related service.
- The date must include the month, day, and year, and extend no more than a year from the date of the meeting.
- The location refers to the type of environment that is the appropriate place for the provision of the service (e.g., the regular classroom, resource room).

- The total time that a student with a disability spends receiving general education, special education, and related services should equal the total amount of time the student spends in school.

The extent to which the student will NOT be able to participate in general education programs

The IEP must include a statement of the extent, if any, to which the student will not participate in the regular classroom, general education curriculum, extracurricular, or other nonacademic activities. The same program options and non-academic services that are available to students without disabilities must be available to students with disabilities. Program options typically include: art, music, industrial arts, clubs, home economics, sports, field trips, and vocational education. Non-academic services and extra-curricular activities typically include athletics, health services, recreational activities and special interest groups or clubs.

Justification for placement

The IEP must include an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the student will not participate with students without disabilities in the general education curriculum and regular classroom, as well as in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities. A justification for placement must be provided on the IEP.

What are Assistive Technology Devices and Services?

As part of developing a student's IEP, the IEP team will consider the student's need for assistive technology devices and services.

Assistive technology devices are defined as any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability. Assistive technology devices can be acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized. Since the explosion of technology in our country, assistive technology devices have become more widely available and have been shown to dramatically improve the functional capabilities of a student with a disability in terms of mobility, communication, employment, and learning. Many of the devices have been instrumental in allowing students with disabilities to be educated in regular classrooms, working and learning alongside of their nondisabled peers. Some examples of these devices are: electronic communication aids, devices that enlarge printed words on a computer screen, devices that facilitate communication for individuals with hearing impairments, prosthetic devices, Braille writers, and keyboards adapted for fist or foot use.

Assistive technology services are any services that directly assist a student with a disability to select, acquire, or use an assistive technology device. This includes evaluating the needs of the student, including a functional evaluation in the student's customary environment. The term also includes such services as:

- purchasing, leasing, or otherwise providing for the acquisition of assistive technology devices by students with disabilities
- selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing assistive technology devices

- coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with assistive technology devices such as those associated with existing educational and rehabilitation plans and programs
- providing training and technical assistance for the student with a disability or, if appropriate, the student's family
- providing training and technical assistance for professionals (including individuals providing education or rehabilitation services), employers, or others who provide services to, employ, or are otherwise substantially involved in the major life functions of that student.

What are Related Services?

In general, the term related services are defined as "transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education." The following are included within the definition of related services:

- speech-language pathology and audiology services
- psychological services
- physical and occupational therapy
- recreation, including therapeutic recreation
- early identification and assessment of disabilities in students
- counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling
- orientation and mobility services
- medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes
- school health services
- social work services in schools
- parent/guardian counseling and training
- transportation

It is important to recognize that each student with a disability may not require all of the available types of related services. As under prior law, the list of related services is not exhaustive and may include other developmental, corrective, or supportive services (such as artistic and cultural programs, art, music, and dance therapy) if they are required to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education in order for the student to receive FAPE.

As States respond to the requirements of Federal law, many have legislated their own related service requirements, which may include services beyond those specified in IDEA. Further, if it is determined that a student with a disability requires a particular supportive service in order to receive FAPE, that service can be considered a related service and must be provided at no cost to the parent/guardians.

School districts may not charge parent/guardians of eligible students with disabilities for the costs of related services that have been included on the student's IEP. Just as special and general education must be provided to an eligible student with a disability at no cost to the parent/guardian or guardian, so, too, must related services when the IEP team has determined that such services are required in order for the student to receive FAPE and have included them in the student's IEP.

How is a Student's Placement Determined?

In some states, the IEP team serves as the group making the placement decision. In other states, this decision may be made by another group of people. In all cases, the parent/guardians have the right to be members of the group that decides the educational placement of the student.

Placement decisions must be made according to IDEA's least restrictive environment requirements—commonly known as LRE. These requirements state that, to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities must be educated with students who do not have disabilities.

The law also clearly states that special classes, separate schools, or other removal of students with disabilities from the general educational environment may occur only if the nature or severity of the student's disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Depending on the needs of the student, his or her IEP may be carried out in the regular class (with supplementary aids and services, as needed), in a special class (where every student in the class is receiving special education services for some or all of the day), in a special school, at home, in a hospital and institution, or in another setting. A school system may meet its obligation to ensure that the student has an appropriate placement available by:

- providing an appropriate program for the student on its own
- contracting with another agency to provide an appropriate program
- utilizing some other mechanism or arrangement that is consistent with IDEA for providing or paying for an appropriate program for the student.

The law requires that the public agency ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of students with disabilities for special education and related services. This continuum must include instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions, and make provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement.

What Happens after the IEP is Written?

When the IEP has been written, parent/guardians must receive a copy at no cost to themselves. The IDEA also stresses that everyone who will be involved in implementing the IEP must have access to the document. This includes the student's:

- general education teacher(s)
- special education teacher(s)
- related service provider(s) (for example, speech therapist)
- any other service provider (such as a paraprofessional) who will be responsible for a part of the student's education.

Each of these individuals needs to know what his or her specific responsibilities are for carrying out the student's IEP. This includes the specific accommodations, modifications, and supports that the student must receive, according to the IEP.

How Does the IEP Get Implemented?

Once the IEP is written, it is time to carry it out—in other words, to provide the student with the special education and related services as listed in the IEP. This includes all supplementary aids and services and program modifications that the IEP team has identified as necessary for the student to advance appropriately toward his or her IEP goals, to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum, and participate in other school activities. While it is beyond the scope of this guide to discuss in detail the many issues involved in implementing a student's IEP, certain suggestions can be offered.

- Every individual involved in providing services to the student should know and understand his or her responsibilities for carrying out the IEP. This will help ensure that the student receives the services that have been planned, including the specific modifications and accommodations the IEP team has identified as necessary.
- Teamwork plays an important part in carrying out the IEP. Many professionals are likely to be involved in providing services and supports to the student. Sharing expertise and insights can help make everyone's job a lot easier and can certainly improve results for students with disabilities. Schools can encourage teamwork by giving teachers, support staff and/or paraprofessionals time to plan or work together on such matters as adapting the general curriculum to address the student's unique needs. Teachers, support staff, and others providing services for students with disabilities may request training and staff development.
- Communication between home and school is also important. Parent/guardians can share information about what is happening at home and build upon what the student is learning at school. If the student is having difficulty at school, parent/guardians may be able to offer insight or help the school explore possible reasons as well as possible solutions.
- It is helpful to have someone in charge of coordinating and monitoring the services the student receives. In addition to special education, the student may be receiving any number of related services. Many people may be involved in delivering those services. Having a person in charge of overseeing that services are being delivered as planned can help ensure that the IEP is being carried out appropriately.
- The regular progress reports that the law requires will help parent/guardians and schools monitor the student's progress toward his or her annual goals. It is important to know if the student is not making the progress expected—or if he or she has progressed much faster than expected. Together, parent/guardians and school personnel can then address the student's needs as those needs become evident.

How Often Will a Student's IEP be Reviewed and Revised?

The IEP team must review the student's IEP at least once a year. One purpose of this review is to see whether the student is achieving his or her annual goals. The team must revise the student's individualized education program, if necessary, to address:

- the student's progress or lack of expected progress toward the annual goals and in the general curriculum
- information gathered through any reevaluation of the student

- information about the student that the parent/guardians share
- information about the student that the school shares (for example, insights from the teacher based on his or her observation of the student or the student's classwork)
- the student's anticipated needs
- other matters.

Although the IDEA requires this IEP review at least once a year, in fact the team may review and revise the IEP more often. Either the parent/guardians or the school can ask to hold an IEP meeting to revise the student's IEP. For example, the student may not be making progress toward his or her IEP goals, and his or her teacher or parent/guardians may become concerned. On the other hand, the student may have met most or all of the goals in the IEP, and new ones need to be written. In either case, the IEP team would meet to revise the IEP.

What are Some Guiding Principles for IEP Development?

The following guiding principles for IEP development are important to ensure that each student's IEP is developed and implemented in the true spirit and intent of the law.

- The IEP development process is a student-centered process. No other issues, agenda or purposes should interfere.
- Information provided by parent/guardians regarding their student's strengths and needs is a vital part of the evaluation and is critical in developing an IEP that will lead to student success.
- The input of each individual on the Committee should be encouraged and valued.
- All members of the Committee share the responsibility to contribute meaningfully in the development of a student's IEP.
- Meaningful efforts must be made to ensure parent/guardians and students participate in the IEP development process. Information is shared in language a parent/guardian and student can understand.
- Special education is a service, not a place. The IEP development process evolves to address concerns and considerations so as to support the student's progress toward the State's learning standards and to ensure the student receives services in the least restrictive environment appropriate for the student.
- The IEP recommendations are based on the student's present levels of performance and in consideration of the student's strengths, needs, interests and preferences and the concerns of the parent/guardian for the education of their student.
- The IEP needs to be developed in such a way that it is a useful document that guides instruction and provides a tool to measure progress.
- The IEP must appropriately address all the student's unique needs without regard to the current availability of needed services.
- Positive behavioral supports and services needed by the student are identified.
- A student's need for transition services is considered throughout the IEP development process, including during discussions of the student's present levels of performance, projected post-school outcomes, goals and objectives/benchmarks, services, accommodations, program modifications and placement.
- The student's parent/guardians participate in developing, reviewing and revising the IEP, having concerns and information considered and being regularly informed of their student's progress.
- The IEP development process includes steps to ensure IEP implementation.

Summary of the Steps to Developing and Implementing an IEP

The IEP needs to be developed in a particular sequence, in accordance with a parent/guardian's due process rights (e.g., meeting notices, prior notices, consent, participation). The information considered and discussed in each step provides the basis for the next step in the process.

Step 1: Obtain and consider evaluation information

Evaluation information must be obtained in all areas of the student's disability or suspected disability. Evaluations need to identify and provide instructionally relevant information as to the unique needs of the student, current functioning, cognitive, physical, developmental and behavioral factors that affect learning and how the disability affects the student's participation and progress in the general education curriculum and in general education classes (or, for preschool students with disabilities, participation in appropriate activities).

Step 2: Identify the student's present levels of educational performance

The student's present skills, strengths and individual needs must be discussed and documented. This includes how the student's disability affects his or her participation and progress in the general education curriculum (or for preschool students, participation in appropriate activities), consideration of specific student needs, and the student's needs as they relate to transition from school to post-school activities.

Step 3: Identify the projected post-school outcomes

Beginning at age 15, the Committee must, in consideration of the student's needs, preferences and interests, identify projected post-school outcomes for the student in the areas of employment, post-secondary education and community living.

Step 4: Set realistic and measurable goals for the student

The measurable annual goals that the student can realistically reach in the year in which the IEP will be in effect and that will move the student toward the projected post-school outcomes must be discussed and documented on the IEP. For each annual goal, measurable intermediate steps between the student's present levels of performance and the annual goals (i.e., the short-term instructional objectives and/or benchmarks) must be identified. These goals should relate to the student's unique needs and promote the student's participation and progress in the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment. In determining goals, the Committee must discuss and document how the student's progress toward the goals will be measured and communicated to the student's parent/guardians.

Step 5: Determine the special education services the student will need

Based on the student's needs and goals, the Committee must decide what services and programs, as well as accommodations, program modifications and supports the student needs.

Step 6: Determine the coordinated set of transition activities

For students beginning at age 14, the Committee must identify courses of study to meet a student's transition needs; beginning at age 15, the Committee must identify the transition activities that will be provided to help the student reach his or her annual goals and projected post-school outcomes.

Step 7: Determine where those services will be provided

The Committee must decide where the special education services will be provided. The location of services and the recommended placement must be based upon least restrictive environment requirements. Unless the student's IEP requires some other arrangement, the student with a disability must be educated in the school he or she would have attended if the student did not have a disability.

Step 8: Implementation

There may be no delay in implementing a student's IEP, including any case in which the payment source for providing or paying for special education services for the student is being determined. The student's IEP needs to be implemented as soon as possible following the Committee meeting and must be implemented as recommended by the Committee.

The school must take steps to ensure a student's IEP is implemented as recommended by the Committee, including but not limited to:

- providing copies of the student's IEP, as appropriate
- informing each individual of his or her IEP implementation responsibilities
- providing a student with his or her instructional materials in an alternative format if recommended on the student's IEP.

Step 9: Measure progress throughout the year

A process needs to be identified to measure the student's progress toward meeting the annual goals and report the progress to the student's parent/guardians in the format and time schedule as agreed upon in the student's IEP.

Step 10: Review and, if appropriate, revise the IEP

The Committee must reconvene to review the student's IEP when requested by the student's teacher or parent/guardian, but at least annually. Discussions at the IEP review meeting must consider the student's progress toward meeting the annual goals, the concerns of the parent/guardian, any new evaluation information, the student's progress in the general education curriculum (or for preschool students, participation in appropriate activities), the student's need for test accommodations and identify the least restrictive environment for the student. For students ages 15 and older, the projected post-school outcomes should be reviewed annually.

Upon consideration of these factors, the IEP should be revised, as appropriate, to address any lack of expected progress toward the annual goals and in the general education curriculum; the results of any reevaluation and any information about the student provided to, or by, the parent/guardians; the student's anticipated needs; or other matters, including a student's need for test accommodations.

Step 11: Conduct a meeting to review reevaluation information on the student

The needs of students change over time. Therefore, a reevaluation of the student's individual needs and the continued appropriateness of the special education services that have been provided to the student must be conducted at least every three years, but more often if conditions warrant or if the parent/guardian or the teacher requests a reevaluation of the student. The Committee must convene a meeting to discuss and, if appropriate, revise the student's IEP in consideration of the results of the reevaluation.