



Getting Organized

Being an advocate for your child is easier when you are organized and prepared to discuss your concerns. By organizing all of the paperwork that you receive from the school about your child you will be able to refer to prior IEPs, look up assessment results from a year or two ago, refresh your memory about specific commitments that were made, and track your child's progress. In this way you can be factual and specific in presenting your concerns.

But, you may ask, how can I organize ALL OF THOSE PAPERS?? This packet of information will help you do that. You will start with a binder, create a one page profile or "cheat sheet" on your child, and begin to sort through the assessments, notices, IEPs, etc. that you have been collecting. If you do not have the last 2-3 years worth of IEPs, you can request those in writing from the school so that your records are complete. Then, you can file any new documents you receive in your newly organized binder.

This packet provides some guidance on how to get started with organizing, information on accessing school records, an IEP Planning Form, a Checklist for Assessments, and information on goals and objectives including a Goal Setting Worksheet. You also may find helpful some information on interpreting test scores. Feel free to duplicate the Contact Log, Key People Contact List, and Medication Log so that you will have fresh ones to fill in as your child moves through school.

It is never too late to begin being organized!

Other Information Packets Available:

504 Plans
ADHD/ADD
Assessments
Autism
Behavior
Bullying
Emotional Difficulties
Individual Education Plans (IEP)
Learning Disabilities
Promotion and Retention
School Discipline
A Student's Guide to the IEP

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IEP Resources

Selected Materials

- Complete IEP Guide: How to Advocate for Your Special Ed Child* (2004) – Lawrence Siegel
- From Emotions to Advocacy: The Special Education Survival Guide* (2005) – Peter & Pamela Wright
- How Well Does Your IEP Measure Up? Quality Indicators for Effective Service Delivery* (2002) – Diane Twachtman-Cullen
- Local Parent Handbooks on Special Ed – Call your SELPA (Special Ed. Local Plan Area)
- Negotiating the Special Education Maze* – Deidre Hayden
- Nolo's IEP Guide: Learning Disabilities* (2005) – Lawrence Siegel
- Special Education Rights and Responsibilities* – CASE and PAI
- Straight Talk about Psychological Testing for Kids* (2003) – Ellen Braaten and Gretchen Felopulos
- Why Johnny Doesn't Behave: Twenty Tips & Measurable BIPs* (2003) – Barbara Bateman & Annemieke Golly
- Wrightslaw: IDEA 2004* (2005) – Peter and Pam Wright
- Writing Measurable IEP Goals and Objectives* (2003) – Barbara Bateman & Cynthia Herr

Selected Websites:

- CADRE – Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education www.directionservice.org/cadre
- California Department of Education www.cde.ca.gov
- Families and Advocates Partnership for Education www.fape.org
- Great Schools www.greatschools.net
- Matrix Parent Network and Resource Center www.matrixparents.org
- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities www.nichcy.org
- Protection and Advocacy, Inc. (PAI) www.pai-ca.org

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Organizing School Related Papers

Getting organized will help you support your child and the school in meeting your child's unique needs. A binder containing your child's important papers will help you see trends and patterns and can improve your communication with the school. Creating a one page summary of your child's strengths, interests and needs to give teachers at the beginning of the year has proved helpful to many parents.

Create a One Page Profile

Keep the profile to one page to make it easier for busy teachers to get the highlights of your child's IEP as well as some more personal attributes. Categories might include:

- Basic information: age, siblings, pets, interests, summer activities
- Medical: medication and any impact at school (i.e. not hungry at lunch, often thirsty, lethargy) and/or any physical limitations (i.e. seizure resulted in left side weak)
- Education: tutoring, remediation, school changes, IEP date, classroom accommodations
- Strengths and challenges

Obtain and Organize Records

Check to see if you have the last 2 or 3 years of your child's records. If not, make a written request for your child's records, both the cumulative and Special Education files.

Once you have all the necessary papers related to the IEP, you are ready to sort and organize:

- Use a large 3-ring binder. Make sure you have a paper hole-punch too!
- File chronologically with the most recent on the top.
- Put something that reminds you of your child on the front cover such as a picture
- Put a school calendar and your Special Education Rights in the pockets.
- Use tabs to divide your papers into categories that best suit your needs: **(suggestions)**
 - Contact information for teachers, therapists, administrators, etc
 - IEP documents: meeting notice, eligibility determination, goals and objectives, services, placement, behavior plans, comments, etc. Keep all related IEP documents and notes.
 - Assessments: school and independent and any other reports on your child
 - Child's work: Report cards, progress reports, test results, and work samples.
 - Copies/logs of all communication: Letters, notes, emails and phone calls to and from the school and others serving your child.
 - State or standardized test results: STAR, SAT, CAPA, etc.
 - Medical summary: a list of medications and dosages your child takes at home or at school, (note any changes in the behavior, reaction and dosage), and appointments
 - Your observations: Include notes or observations of your child pertinent to school.

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School Records

Accurate and complete records ensure that school personnel and parents have access to the same information. In reviewing your child's records, you may find that you are missing a document or the school is missing something from your records. School records are so important in planning and serving students with special needs that this issue has been addressed in federal law. The law governing school records is called the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). For more information, ask for your district's school records policy.

Where are School Records Kept?

There are several types of records that may be located in different places: a cumulative file (cum file) maintained at the school, a confidential file which often is maintained by the school psychologist, and a compliance file (at the school district's office).

How Can I See or Get a Copy of School Records?

Call or make a written request to the school principal or special education director. You may request copies (you may be asked to pay the reproduction cost for the copies), or you may ask simply to review them at the school at which time you can make copies of only those documents you need. California law states that schools must give you access to your child's records and/or copies within **5 DAYS** after your written or oral request.

What Records Can I See?

Parents can see all records, files, documents and other materials that are maintained by the school system and contain information relating to their child. This includes all records that refer to your child in any personally identifiable manner. Records including information about other students will not be given to you due to confidentiality laws.

Are there Records I Can't See?

Personal notes of teachers, counselors, and or school administrators made for their own use and shown to no one else (except a substitute teacher); records of school security police when they are kept separate from other records and used for law-enforcement purposes; personnel records of school employees.

May I Make Changes to School Records?

If you feel that a document is inaccurate or misleading, you have a right to request that it be removed or corrected. If the school disagrees, you may submit a written response to the document and it must be included in the file. If the school does not want to comply with your request to correct the information, you may ask for a formal records hearing.

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Checklist for Assessments

Parents must give written consent to assess. In order to understand the assessments that will be used with your child, ask questions about why each assessment tool has been selected, the specifics of what will be measured and how this will be done. Written notice must be provided to parents documenting the school's reasons for denial of assessment.

Assessment:

- Child assessed in all areas related to the suspected disability – think: C.H.A.M.P.S. (communication, health & living skills, academics, motor, perceptual & social/emotional)
- Includes a variety of tools: observation, work samples, interviews and standardized tests
- Includes information from the parent, teachers and related service personnel
- No single score or procedure determines eligibility or a student's program
- Includes discussion of strengths as well as areas of need
- Specifies educational need and explicit instructional implications (i.e. if you are

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IEP Planning Worksheet

Child's Name _____

Date _____

Filling out this form will help you give the IEP team an understanding of who your child is as a whole person. This form can help you organize your thoughts and ensure that you remember to discuss your concerns as well as what you know about how your child learns best. It is important to refer to assessment results or data in order to support your concerns and the requests that you make.

Name three or four areas of strength for your child:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Name three or four areas that your child needs help with:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

What data or assessment results support the concerns you have identified?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Think about what you know about your child, what you have been told and the assessments that you have been given, what goals for your child should be addressed in the educational setting?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

If you know of adjustments (accommodations) or situations that help your child learn, list them here:

What incentives or rewards are helpful with your child?

Other information that the school should know about your child:



Present Levels of Performance Goals/Benchmarks

Present Levels of Performance

- includes strengths and needs
- states results of most recent evaluations which include observations, work samples, test scores
- describes how the disability affects involvement in the general education program
- includes parent or student concerns
- measurable – means observable (can you see it, count it, hear it)
- can be in an academic or non-academic area – any area the disability impacts

Goals

- in any area the disability impacts
- addresses each need identified in assessments
- meaningful and functional
- attainable in one year and focuses on priority areas
- allows student to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum
- specific, measurable and clear on what the student will do, how, where, when and to what degree – NOT OK : “Sarah will improve her writing skills”
- clear on how progress will be measured
- include positive behavior supports if needed
- can you describe the behavior when the goal is reached?
- description of when periodic progress reports will be provided to parents

Benchmarks

- as of 7/1/05, only required for students with significant cognitive disabilities
- measurable and specific
- steps or major milestones toward the goal – think of it as a year long trip and ask where will the student be and what will he/she be doing at certain time periods moving toward the end mark
- at least 2 per goal

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Assessment Scoring Terminology

Test scores can be very confusing to parents. As scores are used along with other data to make decisions about your child, it is important to ASK, ASK, ASK the professionals to give an explanation that you understand. Sometimes professionals forget that not everyone knows the terminology that they use everyday. The following are explanations that may help you:

STANDARD SCORE: in standard scores, the **average** or **mean** score is 100. This is the same as getting a 50% score or a score right in the middle of all of the scores. Standard scores are unlike classroom tests where 100 is a perfect score.

STANDARD DEVIATION: in standard scores, the **average** score or **mean** is 100, with a **standard deviation** of 15. The average child will earn a standard score of 100. If a child scores **1 standard deviation** above the mean, the standard score is 100 plus 15 ($100 + 15 = 115$). If the child scores **1 standard deviation** below the mean, this is 100 minus 15 ($100 - 15 = 85$). Two thirds of all children are between 1 standard deviation below and 1 standard deviation above the average or mean score.

SCALED SCORE: in scaled scores, 10 is the **average** score. This would be the same as getting a 50% score. The **standard deviation** for a scaled score is 3. Again, two thirds of all children fall between 1 standard deviation below ($10 - 3 = 7$) and 1 standard deviation above ($10 + 3 = 13$) the **average/mean** of a scaled score of 10.

PERCENTILE RANK: shows where a child is relative to 100 other students. If you think of 100 students standing in a line according to how well they did on a test, and your child receives a 60% rank, that means that 40 students out of 100 scored better than her and she scored better than 59 other students.

T-SCORES: are usually used to report results on emotional rating scales. Unlike in academic testing where the higher the score the better the result, with T-scores, scores that fall very high or very low may be areas of concern or a problem. For each test, be sure to ask the evaluator to explain the significance of T-scores as the range of scores that may be of concern can vary.

NORM-REFERENCED TESTS: are designed to show how well a given student performs against some average or norm.

STANDARDIZATION: is a procedure for establishing test norms by giving the test to large numbers of children who are representative of those for whom the test is designed.

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Assessment Score and Percentage Conversion Chart

STANDARD SCORE	SUBTEST SCORE	% RANK
145	19	GREATER THAN 99%
140	18	GREATER THAN 99%
135	17	99%
130	16	98%
125	15	95%
120	14	91%
115	13	84%
110	12	75%
109	--	73%
108	--	70%
107	--	68%
106	--	66%
105	11	63%
104	--	61%
103	--	58%
102	--	55%
101	--	53%
100	10	50% MIDDLE
99	--	47%
98	--	45%
97	--	42%
96	--	39%
95	9	37%
94	--	34%
93	--	32%
92	--	30%
91	--	27%
90	8	25%
89	--	23%
88	--	21%
87	--	19%
86	--	18%
85	7	16%
80	6	9%
75	5	5%
70	4	2%
65	3	1%
60	2	LESS THAN 1%
55	1	LESS THAN 1%

GOAL SETTING WORKSHEET

AREA	Present Level Can Do	Present Level Can't Do	Desired Level in one year	Priority
Academic				
Study Skills				
Communication/				

KEY PEOPLE CONTACT LIST

SCHOOL	Name	Phone	Email	Address
Gen. Ed. Teacher				
Spec. Ed. Teacher				
Psychologist				
Counselor				
Speech/language				
Spec. Ed. Program Manager				
Special Ed. Director				
Principal/Assistant Principal				
SELPA Director				
NON SCHOOL				
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Pediatrician				
Psych/Psychiatrist				
Ed Therapist/Tutor				
O.T.				
Speech/Lang.				

CONTACT LOG

Keep a record of all contacts you make, with whom, via which method (email, phone, letter, in person) and key points (issues and actions)

Date/ Time	Person	Method i.e. phone, email, in- person	Key Issues/Actions

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Special Education and Disability ACRONYMS

- 504 – Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990
- ADD – Attention Deficit Disorder
- ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- ASD – Autism Spectrum Disorder
- ASL – American Sign Language
- AT – Assistive Technology
- BD – Behavior Disorders
- BIP - Behavioral Intervention Plan
- CAPD – Central Auditory Processing Disorder
- CCS – California Children’s Services
- DB – Deaf Blind
- DD – Developmental Disability
- DDS – California Department of Developmental Services
- ED – Emotionally Disturbed (also called Seriously Emotionally Disturbed)
- EI – Early Intervention
- ESL – English as a Second Language
- ESY – Extended School Year
- FAPE – Free and Appropriate Public Education
- IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- IEE – Independent Educational Evaluation
- IEP – Individualized Education Program (or Individualized Education Plan)
- IFSP – Individual Family Service Plan
- IQ – Intelligence Quotient
- IPP – Individualized Program Plan
- LEA – Local Education Agency
- LD – Learning Disabilities
- LEP – Limited English Proficient
- LRE – Least Restrictive Environment
- NCLB – No Child Left Behind Act
- OSEP – Office of Special Education Programs
- OT – Occupational Therapy
- PDD – Pervasive Developmental Disorder
- PDD-NOS – Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified
- PT – Physical Therapy
- RSP – Resource Specialist Program
- SDC – Special Day Class
- SEA – State Education Agency
- SLD – Specific Learning Disability (also called LD)
- TBI – Traumatic Brain Injury
- VI – Visually Impaired

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KITCHEN TABLE WORDS OF WISDOM

Tips for Parents of Children with Special Needs From Experienced Parents

1. Enjoy your child.
2. Enjoy being a parent.
3. Learn to trust your gut feelings and your intuition.
4. Ask other parents.
5. Ask for help when you need it.
6. You don't have to do therapy with your child all the time.
7. Play with your child.
8. Make a connection with another parent.
9. Enjoy your child just the way they are.
10. Keep copies of all records.
11. Sometimes the expert is you!
12. Ask for explanations when you need them.
13. Take time for yourself - and others in your family.
14. You are often your child's best advocate.
15. Professionals only have a "snap shot", you have the whole video.
16. Take care of yourself and nurture your marriage.
17. Remember to laugh.
18. Notice the small stuff.
19. Find a strength that your child has as a result of their "special need".
20. Nurture the siblings and give them special time.
21. Take SPECIAL time for yourself and family. (spouse, friends)
22. REST, as often as you need to.
23. This too shall pass - enjoy the moment.
24. Nobody's perfect, just do what you can.
25. Stuff happens that you can't control.
26. It is not your fault.
27. Record "interesting" things about your child to help describe them.
28. Learn all you can about your child's disability.
29. Learn to accept - it is what it is.
30. Each child is unique and your child's path will be their own.