

## First IEP: What to Expect

Are you concerned about your child's development or lack of progress with learning? Is your child having significantly more issues with social relationships or behavior than most children their age? Or perhaps a trusted teacher or friend has suggested you contact your local school district to investigate having your child evaluated for special education services. School districts use the **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** to provide special education services to eligible children ages 3-22. Many disabilities are not readily visible. Specialized testing and observations will be needed to determine the reasons your child seems to be struggling.



It helps to think of the IEP both as a process and as a document to be written. (<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/pa12/>)

### First steps in the IEP process:

1. A parent, teacher, or other service provider submits a written request for an assessment of your child in any area of suspected disability. As the parent, you would need to give written permission before any assessments can begin. To see some sample Assessment Request letters, check <https://www.matrixparents.org/resources/assessment/>
2. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), the district should respond in 15 calendar days from receipt of the request with an approval in writing (called the assessment plan) or denial in writing (called prior written notice). Learn more by clicking this link: <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/notice-prior/>.
3. If you receive an approval, you have at least 15 calendar days from when you receive the assessment plan to sign in agreement and return it to the district.
4. Once signed, the district may take up to 60 days to carry out the assessment plan.

5. You will be asked for your input during the assessment process. Input may be in the form of parent interviews and questionnaires.
6. The initial IEP meeting is scheduled within the same 60-day period. The purpose of this meeting is to determine special education eligibility, goals, services and placement for your child.

Ask for copies of the assessment reports to review *before* the meeting. This will help you to understand the assessment results and make clear and meaningful decisions at your Initial IEP meeting. Put your request in writing. Give the specialists conducting the assessments enough time to plan for getting you the reports at least one week prior to the IEP date. It's helpful to develop good relationships with members of your child's IEP team. Being polite with your requests always helps!

### **Reviewing the reports beforehand gives you these advantages:**

1. You will have the opportunity to process your emotions and reactions to the content of the assessment reports in private.
2. You will be a more involved and informed member of the IEP team.
3. You will prepare your questions, suggestions and comments in advance.
4. You will have time to speak with IEP team members or a Matrix Parent Advisor about anything you find confusing.

Observe your child during the 60-day assessment period; take notes on their academic/social/emotional/functional strengths and weaknesses. Your observations and notes will help you prepare for hearing the assessment results, prioritize your questions and concerns for the IEP meeting and decide if you agree with the information in the reports. For information, tips and strategies to prepare for your First IEP, please refer to:

- <https://www.matrixparents.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/05/IEPpacket.11.14.English.pdf>,
- [https://www.matrixparents.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Assessment.packet\\_English\\_2014.pdf](https://www.matrixparents.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Assessment.packet_English_2014.pdf)
- <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/evaluation/>

### **Processing the information and your emotions:**

At the initial IEP meeting, after introductions, the team will begin by discussing your child's areas of strength and weakness as outlined in each assessment report. This discussion can be deeply sensitive for parents. Be sure to ask for clarification about anything you don't understand. And ask for a break if the discussion is becoming too overwhelming. It's ok to let the IEP team know how you're feeling – but it's not ok to let your emotions get the better of you during the meeting. It's important to give yourself time before the meeting to acknowledge your emotions and process your feelings. Self-care is one of the essential elements of becoming an effective advocate for your child with special needs. Acknowledging emotions around your child's disability is as important as accepting and learning about your child's disability. Both will help you to become the most effective advocate you can be. (<https://www.matrixparents.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/AdvocatingPacket-2018.11.pdf>). Remember you can call Matrix at any time throughout your first IEP process. We're here to help!