

Overview of the IEP & Your Child's Right to Education

In the United States, children with disabilities have the legal right to receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This right is protected under federal special education laws. One of the main tools used to protect this right is the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

What Is an IEP?

An IEP (Individualized Education Program) is a written legal plan created for a child who qualifies for special education services. It explains what supports your child needs, what goals they are working toward, and how the school will help them succeed. The IEP is developed by a team that includes parents, teachers, specialists, and school administrators.

An IEP Explains:

- What supports the child needs
- What goals the child is working toward
- How the school will help the child succeed

What an IEP Includes

- Present Levels of Performance – How your child is currently doing academically, socially, and behaviorally.
- Annual Goals – Measurable goals expected within one year.
- Special Education Services – Speech therapy, occupational therapy, instruction, behavioral supports, counseling.
- Accommodations & Modifications – Extra time, preferential seating, visual schedules, modified assignments.
- Placement – Where services will be provided.
- Progress Monitoring – How and when you will be informed about progress.

Your Child's Educational Rights

- Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- Individualized Instruction
- Qualified Evaluations
- Parent Participation
- Due Process & Dispute Resolution

If services are not appropriate, parents may challenge decisions through mediation, hearings, or formal complaints. In Indiana, a signed written complaint may be submitted to the Indiana Department of Education at 1-317-232-6610.

Parent Rights in the IEP Process

- Request evaluations
- Attend and participate in meetings
- Review records
- Agree or disagree with services
- Bring advocates or specialists
- Request changes to the IEP
- Receive written notice of school decisions

The IEP Process (Step-by-Step)

- Referral
- Evaluation
- Eligibility Determined
- IEP Meeting
- Services Begin
- Ongoing Review

Why IEPs Matter

A strong IEP helps ensure that children:

- Access learning in meaningful ways
- Build academic and life skills
- Receive needed therapies
- Develop independence
- Prepare for adulthood

An IEP protects your child's legal right to succeed in school.