

Contents of the IEP

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IEP stands for “individualized education program.” An IEP is a written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting in keeping with certain requirements of law and regulations.

The Big Picture

Before diving into the specifics of what must be included in an IEP, it’s important to consider the “Big Picture” of the IEP—its purposes, how it serves as a blueprint for the child’s special education and related services under IDEA, and the scope of activities and settings it covers.

The IEP has two general purposes: (1) to establish measurable annual goals for the child; and (2) to state the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services that the public agency will provide to, or on behalf of, the child. When constructing an appropriate educational program for a child with a disability, the IEP team broadly considers the child’s involvement and participation in three main areas of school life:

- the general education curriculum,
- extracurricular activities, and
- nonacademic activities.

By **general education curriculum**, we mean the subject matter provided to children without disabilities and the associated skills they are expected to develop and apply. Examples include math, science, history, and language arts.

When we talk about **extracurricular activities and nonacademic activities**, we’re referring to school activities that fall outside the realm of the general curriculum. These are usually voluntary and tend to be more social than academic. They typically involve others of the same age and may be organized and guided by teachers or other school personnel. Examples: yearbook, school newspaper, school sports, school clubs, lunch, recess, band, pep rallies, assemblies, field trips, after-school programs, recreational clubs.

The IEP can be understood as the blueprint, or plan, for the special education experience of a child with a disability across these school environments.

Who Develops the IEP?

The IEP is developed by a team of school personnel and the child’s parents. This team meets at least once a year and more often, if necessary.

Team members work together to craft an education that will address the child’s individual needs and enable the child to participate in general education and school activities, learning alongside his or her nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. The IEP team then puts its crafted plan down in writing—resulting in the IEP that will guide the delivery of the child’s special education and related services.

What an IEP Must Contain

When the members of a child’s IEP team sit down together and consider how the child will be involved in and participate in school life, they must be sure that the resulting IEP contains the specific information required by IDEA, our nation’s special education law. Here’s a brief list of what IDEA requires:

A statement of the child’s **present levels of academic achievement and functional performance**, including how the child’s disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum;

A statement of measurable **annual goals**, including academic and functional goals;

A description of how the **child’s progress** toward meeting the annual goals will be measured, and when periodic progress reports will be provided;

A statement of the **special education and related services** and **supplementary aids and services** to be provided to the child, or on behalf of the child;

A statement of the **program modifications or supports for school personnel** that will be provided to enable the child to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals; to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and to be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children;

An explanation of the **extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children** in the regular class and in extracurricular and nonacademic activities;

A statement of any **individual accommodations** that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the child on State and districtwide assessments;

(Note: If the IEP team determines that the child must take an alternate assessment instead of a particular regular State or districtwide assessment of student achievement, the IEP must include a statement of why the child cannot participate in the regular assessment and why the particular alternate assessment selected is appropriate for the child; and

The **projected date** for the beginning of the services and modifications, and the anticipated **frequency, location, and duration** of those services and modifications.

Extra IEP Content for Youth with Disabilities

For students approaching the end of their secondary school education, **the IEP must also include statements about what are called transition services**, which are designed to help youth with disabilities prepare for life after high school.

IDEA requires that, beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team, the IEP must include:

- 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 child in reaching those goals.

Also, beginning no later than one year before the child reaches the age of majority under State law, the IEP must include:

- a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under Part B of IDEA (if any) that will transfer to the child on reaching the **age of majority**.

A Closer Look at Each IEP Component

The list above of IEP contents is helpful in understanding what type of information is basically required in a child's IEP. However, the more you understand about each individual part, and especially how they go together to form an action plan for a child's education, the easier it will be to write a well-grounded and effective IEP.

So...use the links below to explore the different parts of the IEP and the details associated with each.

[Present Levels](#)

How is the child currently doing in school? How does the disability affect his or her performance in class? This type of information is captured in the "present levels" statement in the IEP.

[Annual Goals](#)

Once a child's needs are identified, the IEP team works to develop appropriate goals to address those needs. *Annual goal* describe what the child is expected to do or learn within a 12-month period.

[Benchmarks or Short-Term Objectives](#)

Benchmarks or short-term objectives are required only for children with disabilities who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards. If you're wondering what that means, this article will tell you!

Measuring and Reporting Progress

Each child's IEP must also contain a description of how his or her progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured and when it will be reported to parents. Learn more about how to write this statement in this short article.

Special Education

The IEP must contain a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the child, or on behalf of the child. This article focuses on the first element: a statement of the special education that will be provided for the child.

Related Services

To help a child with a disability benefit from special education, he or she may also need extra help in one area or another, such as speaking or moving. This additional help is called *related services*. Find out all about these critical services here.

Supplementary Aids and Services

Supplementary aids and services are intended to improve children's access to learning and their participation across the spectrum of academic, extracurricular, and nonacademic activities and settings. The IEP team must determine what supplementary aids and services a child will need and specify them in the IEP.

Program Modifications for School Personnel

Also part of the IEP is identifying the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided. Read more here.

Extent of Nonparticipation

The IEP must also include an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and in other school settings and activities. Read how this connects to IDEA's foundational principle of LRE.

Accommodations in Assessment

IDEA requires that students with disabilities take part in *state or districtwide assessments*. The IEP team must decide if the student needs accommodations in testing or another type of assessment entirely. In this component of the IEP, the team documents how the student will participate.

Service Delivery

When will the child begin to receive services? Where? How often? How long will a "session" last? Pesky details, but important to include in the IEP!

Transition Planning

Beginning no later than a student's 16th birthday (and younger, if appropriate), the IEP must contain transition-related plans designed to help the student prepare for life after secondary school.

Age of Majority

Beginning at least one year before the student reaches the age of majority, the IEP must include a statement that the student has been told about the rights (if any) that will transfer to him or her at age of majority. What is "age of majority" and what does this statement in the IEP look like?