

# Requesting Prior Written Notice

There are times when you, as a parent, may want to communicate in writing with your child's school about some problem or concern with your child's education or well-being. This brief presents a model letter or email you might write to request that the school provide you with prior written notice.

## **What is Prior Written Notice, and why would I want it?**

There are certain times when the school must put in writing its decisions about your child's education and the reasons for those decisions. This written communication is called prior written notice. You have the right to receive prior written notice whenever the school wants to (or refuses to):

- evaluate your child,
- change your child's disability identification,
- change your child's educational placement, or
- change the way in which your child is provided with a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

The school system is supposed to automatically provide you with prior written notice in any of these events. In practice, however, sometimes the school may tell you its decision over the telephone, in a meeting, or in a one-on-one conversation.

That is definitely not "written" notice. As a parent, you have the right to receive notice in writing, and you can request that the school system provide it. It's always a good idea for you, as a parent, to put your own request in writing.

For example, you may have asked for an independent educational evaluation (IEE) of your child at public expense. The school system may tell you on the phone that it has denied your request. Obviously, that information is not in writing. So you ask that the school provide this notice to you in writing. The school must then put its decision in writing and explain the reasons for the decision. This information can be helpful if you pursue the IEE through a due process hearing. You will then have in writing the school system's reasons for denying the IEE.

## **General Letter-Writing Tips:**

When writing any business letter, it is important to keep it short and to the point. First, start by asking yourself the following questions and state the answers in your letter:

- Why am I writing?
- What are my specific concerns?
- What are my questions?
- What would I like the person to do about this situation?
- What sort of response do I want: a letter, a meeting, a phone call, or something else?

Each letter you write should include the following basic information:

- Put the date on your letter.
- Give your child's full name and the name of your child's main teacher or current class placement.
- Say what you want, rather than what you don't want. Keep it simple.
- Give your address and a daytime phone number where you can be reached.
- Always end your letter with a "thank you."

# When Your Child Turns Three: Moving from an IFSP to an IEP

## What are some other tips to keep in mind?

You want to make a good impression so that the person reading your letter will understand your request and say “yes.” Remember, this person may not know you, your child, or your child’s situation. Keep the tone of your letter pleasant and businesslike. Give the facts without letting anger, frustration, blame, or other negative emotions creep in. Some letter-writing tips include:

- After you write your first draft, put the letter aside for a day or two. Then look at it again and revise it with fresh eyes.
- Read your letter as though you are the person receiving it. Is your request clear? Have you included the important facts? Does your letter ramble on and on? Is it likely to offend, or is the tone businesslike?
- Have someone else read your letter for you. Is your reason for writing clear? Can the reader tell what you are asking for? Would the reader say “yes” if he or she received this letter? Can your letter be improved?
- Use spell check and grammar check on the computer. Or ask someone reliable to edit your letter before you send it.
- Keep a copy for your records.