

I Don't Think My Child's IEP is Working as Well as it Should, What Do I Do?

Before scheduling an IEP meeting to discuss your concern, do some homework. Your initial concern may not be the primary cause of your child's difficulty.

1. List each of your concerns. Next, look for data to support your concerns. Talk with the teacher informally if this feels comfortable.
2. Gather your child's IEP and any assessments. If you aren't sure you have everything, write a letter asking the school to provide you with copies.
3. Review the assessments and IEP papers and make sure you understand these documents. If you need help with this, call MSPTI.
4. If the assessment doesn't cover areas of concern, you might need to ask for additional assessments.
5. Check to see if key issues in the assessment are addressed somewhere in the IEP i.e. goals, accommodations, services, or a behavior plan.
6. If all key issues are covered, maybe your child needs more time receiving current services or maybe the goals need to be more specific and measurable.
7. Sometimes the issue is that you need to be given the data to show what progress is being made on the goals. While the IEP must state how progress will be measured, schools don't need to provide specific data on interim reports.
8. If all key issues are not linked to something in the IEP, you might find you need to ask for additional or different services.
9. If you find the IEP isn't being followed, maybe this can be better understood with a call or email to the principal and school Special Education staff. If the issue seems complex, having an IEP meeting to discuss this may be best. Remember when asking for an IEP meeting, put your request in writing.

IMPORTANT: The IEP is developed from assessment information. If something is missing or incorrect in the assessment, it may be the cause of why the IEP isn't working well.

NOTE: Sometimes a parent agrees with how the IEP is written and the IEP matches the assessment. The concern then may be that the IEP isn't being implemented as it is written.

FINALLY: An IEP is not written in stone. It can be changed as needed. Individual Education Plans are meant to assist your child in making progress on their goals and to access the General Education curriculum. IEPs do not guarantee results and do not mean your student will be taught individually. IEPs should address your child's needs in a individualized and meaningful plan.

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Effective communication is an art and a skill. You communicate well when you are confident in your information and are emotionally relaxed. During Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, you may not always feel this way. You may not understand some of the information and you may feel emotional since you are discussing your child. However, there are things you can do to help you communicate more effectively.

Each of us has our own communication style. It is important to be yourself while also thinking about ways you might adjust your communication for the situation. Sometimes the best way to bring up a concern is to ask a question. This gives the other person an opportunity to problem-solve rather than putting them on the defensive. Here are some tips from other parents:

Build agreements - *We all agree that Sam's grades are poor partially due to incomplete homework. Since we know that Sam's ADHD makes it hard for him to focus at night, can we also agree that Sam needs strategies to use his directed studies time more wisely?* Look and listen for consensus.

Use and ask for facts/data/references - *Can anyone provide information on recommended reading programs for students who have Jennifer's particular difficulty? Who in the district could help us find an intervention that might be more effective?*

Repeat/reflect to confirm - *Do I hear you correctly that you think Sam is choosing not to do his work and that if he tried harder and we were stricter at home this would not be a problem?*

Ask and/or name what is going on - *Everyone is very quiet - is there something else that needs to be said? Or my sense is that not everyone agrees with this decision. Does anyone else have that feeling?*

Acknowledge the positive and express appreciation - *I really appreciate your efforts this year to help Sam stay on task and feel better about himself at school.*

Take a break - *I need to think about this and would like a short break.* If you feel overwhelmed or too emotional it is a good idea to step outside for a few minutes and gather your thoughts or speak with your support person.

In general, keep any communication, whether spoken or written, short and to the point. Use language that is respectful. Email can be a useful communication tool because it is quick and it can document your communication. However, using email has pitfalls: sending too many emails, emails that are too long, or writing and sending emails in a rush.