IEPs at a Glance

A practical introduction to the Individualized Education Program for families.

A Note for Families

If your child has an IEP, or someone has suggested one, it can feel like a lot of information at once. This guide explains what an IEP is, what each part is designed to do, and how families and schools work together. It is a starting point, not a substitute for individualized guidance.

What Is an IEP?

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written plan for students who are eligible for exceptional student education (ESE) services. It describes how your child is performing now, the goals they will work toward, and the services and supports the school will provide to help them get there.

> DEA PERSPECTIVE
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> **An IEP is the beginning, not the finish line.**
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> The plan sets the direction, but progress depends on how consistently it is carried out and how well home and school communicate. You bring expertise about your child. The school brings expertise about instruction. The strongest IEPs reflect both.

Why It Matters

An IEP gives everyone on your child's team the same roadmap. It makes clear what your child will receive, who is responsible, and how progress will be measured and shared with you.

The Parts of an IEP

Present Levels	Where your child is performing now, academically and functionally. Every other part of the IEP builds from this section.
Annual Goals	The specific, measurable skills your child will work on during the IEP year.
Services	The specially designed instruction and related services, such as speech or occupational therapy, your child will receive and how often.
Accommodations	Changes to how your child learns or shows what they know, such as extended time or preferential seating.
Placement	Where services are provided, with the expectation that your child learns alongside peers without disabilities as much as appropriate.
Progress Monitoring	How progress toward each goal will be measured and how often you will receive updates.

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Common Misconceptions

MYTH	WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW
An IEP will solve every learning challenge.	An IEP provides a plan and supports. Progress still depends on instruction, practice, and collaboration between home and school.
An IEP can only be reviewed once a year.	The IEP must be reviewed at least once a year, but you can request an IEP meeting at any time.
If my child doesn't use an accommodation, the school no longer has to offer it.	Accommodations in the IEP must be made available. Your child may choose not to use them, but they should always be offered.

DEA PERSPECTIVE

Collaboration creates better outcomes.

It's okay to ask questions or disagree during an IEP meeting. The most productive meetings happen when families and schools work together respectfully, with the student at the center of every decision.

Need Help Understanding Your Child's IEP?

Every child is different, and no guide can replace individualized support. If you would like help reviewing your child's IEP, understanding educational records, or preparing for an upcoming meeting, schedule a consultation with Distributed Education Advocacy.