

How to Get the Most From Your IEP Meeting

by Herbert D. Hinkle, Esq. and Ira M. Fingles, Esq.

Here are some tips to ensure to the greatest degree possible that an appropriate IEP is developed:

1. Ask the district for copies of any recent evaluations, progress reports, teachers' notes or other relevant documents before the meeting. It can be very difficult to use the information at the meeting if you have not had a chance to review it beforehand.
2. In the same vein, provide any evaluations, progress reports or other written documents that you think are relevant to the IEP teams before the meeting.
3. Decide what questions you want to ask and what you want to accomplish at the meeting. Make a list so you can check things off as you go along.
4. GO TO THE MEETING. Even if you are certain that you will disagree with the IEP, it is essential that you go to the meeting and express your concerns.
5. Take people with you who are knowledgeable about your child's needs and/or special education, such as a private speech therapist or someone from a consumer organization.
6. Take notes at the meeting. Having good notes will help you remember what was discussed at the meeting. Which leads to . . .
7. To tape or not to tape? A tape recorder may hinder open discussion, but it can also be helpful if a dispute arises.
8. Be specific. IEP teams tend to be very vague about a child's abilities and needs. It is up to you to make sure that the details are addressed.
9. Take as much time as you need. Do not feel pressured to squeeze everything into the half-hour or hour you are allotted. If more time is needed, say so.
10. Only sign the IEP (and NORA if applicable) if you are fully in agreement with it.
11. Follow up. Send a follow up letter noting areas of disagreement.

Of course, there is no guarantee that these things will work. Even if they do not, doing them puts you in a much better position to get a favorable resolution at mediation or due process in the event of a dispute.

Copyright © 2000 H.D. Hinkle. All rights reserved.
Hinkle & Fingles, Attorneys at Law
2651 Main Street
Lawrenceville, New Jersey 08648
(609) 896-4200 or (215) 860-2100