Individualized Education Program (IEP)
What is an IEP?

IEP stands for Individualized Education Program. The IEP is a plan that is created for a child based on their skills and what they can do. It is used to make sure they are getting the help they need in the classroom in order to succeed.

Kids with delayed skills or other disabilities might be able to get special education services in public schools, free of charge.

Who needs an IEP?

A child who has trouble learning and doing things on their own, or a special needs student, is the perfect student to look at for an IEP.

Kids may be having trouble for reasons such as:

- Learning Disabilities
- Hearing Problems
- Physical Disabilities
- Autism
- Vision Problems
- Difficulties with Speech or Language
- Emotional Disorders
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Developmental Delay
- Cognitive Challenges
How to get an IEP for your Child

Below are the steps that are involved in getting an IEP in place for a child.

1. The Referral
2. The Assessment/Evaluation
3. IEP Meeting/Developing the IEP
4. Services are given to the student

1. The referral/request

If a parent notices their child is having a hard time learning, they may make a written request to have their child tested to see if an IEP would be helpful for them. This request should be given to their child’s school as soon as parents notice their child is having a hard time so the child can get help quickly. See page ___ for a sample request letter.

Sometimes your child's teacher or doctor will notice your child is having a hard time and may suggest you look at special education services for them.

What happens after the referral/request is made?

The first step is to gather details about the student's progress or problems in school. This may be done through:

- A conference with the parents or the student
- School staff looking at the student's tests, classwork, homework, behavior
- Teachers/school staff observing the student

These details help the school decide the next step, whether it be to come up with ways to help the student do better in school or have the child tested to and get an IEP.
2. The assessment/evaluation

If the school thinks that a child needs to be tested to see if an IEP will help them in school, the parent will have to sign a form and agree to have their child tested. The form should state who is involved in the process and the types of tests they use.

If the parent decides to have their child tested a team of experts will assess the child based on how the child acts and how they can complete daily work such as tests, quizzes, classwork, and homework.

Who assesses my child?
Based on what areas the child needs help in, the team of experts who test the child can include:

- a psychologist
- a physical therapist
- an occupational therapist
- a speech therapist
- a special teacher
- a vision or hearing specialist
- others, depending on the child's needs

What will be on the assessment?
The student should be tested in all areas related to the kinds of services the student will receive, which may include measures of school skills, such as reading or math, as well as other skills, such as speech and language. The testing might also include areas like self-help, mobility skills, social and emotional status.

After the assessment
Once the people on team finish their tests and make their own plan, they create a comprehensive evaluation report (CER) that puts their findings in one place and outlines the skills and support the child will need.

The parents then have a chance to review the report before the IEP is written out. Parents may not agree with the report, and they will have the chance to work together with the school to come up with a plan that best meets the child's needs.
The next step is an IEP meeting. At the meeting, the team will discuss the child's school needs — as described in the CER — and come up with specific, short-term and annual goals for each of those needs and ways to measure them. The IEP will be finished with a written report at this meeting.

If parents attend this meeting, they can take an active role in choosing the goals of the IEP and which areas need to be focused on more.

What is in the written IEP report?
The IEP outlines the support services the child will receive and how often they will be given to the child. Support services might include special classes, speech therapy, occupational or physical therapy, counseling, audiology, medical services, nursing, and vision or hearing therapy. The IEP might also include changes to how the student does school work that other students are doing.

4. Student receives services
In most cases, the services and goals outlined in an IEP can be provided in a normal school setting. This can be done in the classroom (for example, a reading teacher helping a small group of children who need extra help while the other kids in the class work on reading with the regular teacher) or in a special resource room at the school. The resource room can serve a group of kids with the same needs who all need help.

However, kids who need more resources may be taught in a special school setting. These classes have fewer students per teacher so the teacher can give more help to each student.

In addition, the teacher usually has special training in helping kids with special educational needs. The children spend most of their day in a special classroom and join the normal classes for things like music and gym or for things that they don't need extra help with.
Additional Resources

How often should the student be re-tested for the IEP?

Usually the special education services that a student is getting should be re-evaluated every 3 years to make sure they are still helping the student. Also, whenever the student’s parents, teacher or district staff request it, the student should be re-tested.

Re-evaluation does not always mean that the child will need to go through testing again. The re-evaluation could mean that the IEP team, and the child’s parents, will look at the current plan and see if any changes need to be made or if the child still requires an IEP.

Know your rights

There are schedules that clearly say how long the district may wait between each step of the process. This is to make sure IEP moves from referral to providing services quickly. Be sure to ask about this schedule and get a copy of your parents’ rights when your child is referred. These guidelines state your rights as a parent to control what happens to your child during each step of the process.

The parents' rights also describe how you can proceed if you do not agree with any part of the CER or the IEP — mediation and hearings both are options. You can find out about low-cost or free legal services from the school district or, if your child is in Early Intervention (for kids up to age 3), through that program.