

## Basic Advocacy Tips & Tricks

### • OUTSIDE OF IEP MEETINGS

- Know your annual and triennial dates
  - You will have the annual IEP before the year is up. Knowing in advance can help you to prepare far enough in advance.
  - Every 3 years, your child will be reassessed by the school psychologist to determine if they are still eligible for special education services. For students with Angelman Syndrome, there is often no question that they will continue to be eligible for special education services - the psychological assessment report is used to guide the formulation of the IEP.
- Review the IEP Progress Reports when you get them
  - Students with IEP's should be getting updates on progress on IEP goals at least as often as students without IEP's get report cards
- Understand the term "Prior Written Notice"
  - The law says you *must receive prior written notice every and any time the school proposes to (or refuses to) initiate or change anything related to identification, evaluation, placement, FAPE.*
  - Read this information that comes home – you will be able to better prepare yourself for any meetings or discussions that will then happen
  - If the school proposes a change via a discussion with you, *ask for the prior written notice.* Through it they will need to explain why and support their proposal - again, you can use this information to develop counterarguments if needed
- Ask for a draft IEP
  - Pro's: you will be able to participate more in the discussion at the meeting because you will have already read it through, you will have notes to better organize your thoughts; the meeting can be more efficient because team members can summarize their sections
  - Con's: it may appear that the team has decided on things without your input, discussion might be limited at meeting because team assumes you read everything
  - If you're going to ask for a draft IEP, let the teacher know far in advance you will be asking for a draft of the IEP and how many days in advance of the meeting you'd like to receive it
- Keep communication with the school team formal
  - Rely on email or other written communication (i.e. daily communication notebook – copy it!) This is much easier to keep for your records.
  - Don't rely on texting with your child's teachers! Texts disappear and are easily misinterpreted. Keep your written communication to email.

### • DURING IEP MEETINGS

- Accept the Procedural Safeguards/Parent Rights packet
  - At *every meeting* the school team is required to offer you a copy of your procedural safeguards – make sure you accept a copy at some point! This explains your rights and the procedures for what to do if you disagree with something
- Ask for clarification
  - Remember that the school team does the IEP meeting process *all the time*, and you do one a year (ideally – if there are disagreements you may have more meetings). If you don't understand terminology or a process or why something is happening, ask!
- Meeting notes are important!
  - Make sure items and concerns that you feel strongly about are documented in the meeting notes
  - Ask the notes to be read back to the team before the meeting is adjourned to ensure everyone's concerns and discussion are documented and the documentation is accurate

- Ask for further testing to be done
  - If the team can't come to an immediate agreement or compromise, ask if further testing can be done to give the team more information needed to make a decision
- Actively listen to other team members
  - Even if what they're saying is hard to hear, actively listen and then state your opinion ("I think I hear you saying \_\_\_\_\_. I disagree because \_\_\_\_\_").
- Don't sign consent at the meeting
  - If you disagree with anything or just want more time to review the document, do not sign consent to the IEP at the meeting
  - If you don't sign at the meeting, it varies state-by-state on what happens next – your Procedural Safeguards will tell you what the procedures are for your district
- HOW TO GET MORE (more service time, more support, etc.)
  - Build relationships with school staff year round
  - Build your record (i.e. keep everything anybody from the school gives you)
    - You will have a better case no matter what your request if you have data, progress reports, previous assessments, etc.
    - Do 'build your record' throughout the year – write things down when they happen. Don't try to write everything down/gather everything right before the meeting.
  - State your concerns calmly and objectively, and *keep the focus in terms of your child's needs* and use data to support your claims
    - Ex: the behavior data sheet shows that my child keeps showing more aggressive behaviors during math center times. More support is needed during math centers
    - Ex: I'm seeing on the past 3 progress reports that little/no progress has been made on the peer interaction goal, and the assessment data at his reevaluation demonstrated that was an area of deficit. How can we work together to create more peer interaction opportunities and to help my daughter be more successful when those opportunities occur?
- IF YOU CAN'T COME TO AN AGREEMENT
  - You've tried reconvening and compromising with the school team but nothing is working –
    1. Refer to the Procedural Safeguards/Parent Rights packet given to you for the specific procedure to follow for your district/state
    2. Options include:
      - a. Mediation: a meeting facilitated by an impartial mediator, a legally binding agreement would result and then a new IEP meeting/document put into place based on the agreement
      - b. Due Process Hearing: formal hearing with an impartial hearing officer (school will involve an attorney at this step so you will probably want to as well).
    3. Often, parents will try Mediation first and then if no agreement can be reached than go to Due Process
  - Again, the Procedural Safeguards/Parent Rights packet has the specifics – what your options are and where to send/notify your written notification. You can also find this info posted on most district and state Department of Education websites.