



IEP Toolbox

Special Education Paperwork Management Tips

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For the Special Education Teacher:

- Don't be afraid to ask for help. Seek out the support and advice of experienced colleagues.
- In early September, use a large wall calendar to mark down all of your paperwork deadlines, re-evaluation meetings, and other important due dates for the entire school year. Refer to the calendar at least once a week.
- Have a method to disseminate the information staff will need to implement the IEP for the new school year including such items as goals, behavior plans and supplementary aids and services.
- Whenever possible, consolidate meetings with parents so that you can cover several issues at one time. (Examples: parent conferences, progress monitoring meetings)
- Get into the regular habit of retaining student work samples so that you will be prepared in case of an unexpected request.
- When designing IEP goals, consider methods of evaluation that are both practical and easy to implement. Assessments such as quiz grades, homework assignments, and teacher observations provide a simple, but useful snapshot of student progress.
- Keep up to date with IEP workshops and in-service trainings. Investing two hours of your time at a workshop may save you twenty hours of corrections on erroneous paperwork.
- Ask presenters at workshops to give examples that demonstrate compliance for new paperwork. Samples bring the reality factor to theories and regulations.
- Involve the student in the creation and implementation of the IEP as much as possible. It will not only improve the student's skills as a self-advocate, but will also eliminate some of the guesswork associated with documenting student narrative, strengths, and preferences. Another benefit will be student buy-in on goals and behavior plans.

- Know when to take a break. Take time to exercise, pursue a hobby or socialize with family and friends. Feelings of stress, frustration, and anxiety will not benefit you or your students.
- Progress monitoring requires getting a status report from the content area teachers. Find out what method the staff is familiar using in your building and use it. In cases where the request does not result in timely feedback you can send email reminders, brightly colored memos through mailboxes or voicemail. Gather the reports to use at the IEP meeting and reflect the information in the present educational levels.
- Expect changes in IEP forms on a regular basis. It is a fact of life because when changes occur in federal law or state regulations the paperwork must reflect those changes. Class action court cases can also impact documentation.
- Draft IEP documents are allowable at IEP meetings. Check your employer's directives on their policies or position on drafts. Abide by your employer's requirements. IEP forms you develop independent of the IEP team should have the word "draft" placed on the document. It is critically important that at regular intervals during the IEP meeting that you get feedback and input from the rest of the IEP team members in the development of the new or revised IEP.
- Start the IEP invitation process early so delays and schedule conflicts don't place your efforts out of compliance with deadlines.
- Remember pursuant to the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the IDEA, parents have the right to review emails, letters, and other written forms of communication which are part of their child's educational record.
- These statutes also require that school employees refrain from releasing information from educational records unless they have consent.

Review the following suggestions and make recommendations to your administration based on a consensus on the special education department.

For the Administrator, Special Education Director, or Department Head:

- Provide regular paperwork training and support for all personnel.
- Be readily available to answer questions or provide feedback for teachers regarding their IEPs and related paperwork.
- If possible, provide new special education teachers with a reduced caseload for their first year. This will allow them to better focus on the instructional demands of the job.

- Know your caseload maximums based on Chapter 14. Paperwork is proportional to the number of students you are assigned. Chapter 14 requires that each identified student be assigned a case manager. <http://www.pacode.com/secure/data/022/chapter14/chap14toc.html>
- Provide new teachers with a mentor who is more knowledgeable and experienced with IEP paperwork.
- Have representatives of teachers, paraprofessionals, and related service staff attend state and county-wide trainings to obtain information from the source of the directive rather than getting it second hand. Attendance at trainings gives practitioners opportunities to ask questions of the policy leaders and experts.