

**Insuring an Appropriate Education for your Child—Working with the CSE
(Committee on Special Education)**

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It is that time of year again. School District Committees on Special Education are frantically scheduling IEP (Individualized Education Program) annual review meetings to insure that a plan is in place at the beginning of the next school year (as required under the IDEA). Parents are feeling rushed through the meetings and asked to agree to next year's placement. Everyone's head is spinning.

Let's take a step back. An IEP meeting is supposed to be a collaborative meeting where parents, faculty, professionals and staff members discuss a child's progress during the last year and determine the goals, services and placements for next year. Often, however, parents are read comments from teachers and professionals and either read or are handed the proposed IEP for next year at the meeting. It can be very confusing and frustrating.

What is a parent to do?

First, as parents, we must remember that we know our child better than anyone else.

Second, we observe our child all year long and can see what is working and what is not working.

Third, we are often in touch with the professionals and the teachers throughout the year and are familiar with our child's progress or lack of progress.

Knowing our child, observing our child and being in touch with his/her professionals and teachers all year gives us a lot of information about what is going on in school and the progress our child is or isn't making.

Before going to the IEP meeting, we can, and should, sit down and think about how our child is doing in school this year. What expectations did we have for our child's accomplishments? At the beginning of the year was it expected that Lauren would be able to write her name? Can she do

that at the end of the year? If not, why not. Did John's speech improve measurably? Can he say his name intelligibly?

As a parent, you can plan for your child before the meeting. If you have questions, write them down and be sure that they are addressed. If you believe that Jim needs speech five days a week and not two, prepare to ask for it or ask for testing to address the issue. If he needs more ABA training, ask for it. Come prepared with your and your professional's recommendations. We then must plan how to incorporate our information and plan for our child with that of the CSE.

In order to be more fully prepared you can ask that you be given a copy of the School's proposed or draft IEP before the meeting so that you can review it, digest it, and be prepared to discuss it at the meeting. If this is not possible, advise the Committee at the meeting that you want to schedule a follow up meeting immediately after you have had an opportunity to review and digest the information provided.

Parents can ask for an IEP meeting at any time. The law provides that a CSE meeting can be called at any time and that the parent has the right to ask for a meeting to be scheduled. You do not have to wait for the District to schedule one. In fact, you can agree to an IEP at the annual meeting and then find circumstances have changed and ask for another meeting at any time of the year to amend or change the IEP that is in place.

So, don't panic, don't feel frustrated and rushed. As a matter of fact, if you believe that you need more time to discuss your child's progress and plan, let the CSE Chair know and ask for additional time. In order for our children to get the most of their education, we must advocate for them. If your child or you have needs ask for them. The CSE, the parents and child must work together. If you need additional time or meetings, just ask. You may be surprised at the answer.