

## What is an IEP?

An **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is a legally binding document for a child with a disability that outlines the child's special education and related services. 📖 It's a collaborative blueprint, created by a team of professionals and parents, that ensures a student receives a **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**. The IEP is a cornerstone of special education in the U.S. and is based on federal law.

## Key Components of an IEP Guide

A comprehensive IEP guide should explain the following crucial sections of the IEP document and the process:

- **Eligibility and Evaluation:** The guide should clarify the process for determining if a child has one of the 13 disabilities recognized under IDEA and if that disability adversely affects their educational performance, making them eligible for special education services. This section should detail the initial evaluation and the triennial reevaluation.
- **Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP):** This section is the foundation of the entire IEP. It's a detailed snapshot of a student's current performance in school and how their disability impacts their involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. The guide should explain how to gather this information from various sources, including assessments, grades, and observations.
- **Measurable Annual Goals:** These are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (**SMART**) goals that a student can reasonably achieve within one year. A good guide will provide examples and explain how goals should be connected to the PLAAFP statement.
- **Special Education and Related Services:** The guide should detail the specific services a student will receive, such as specialized academic instruction, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, or counseling. It should also clarify the frequency, location, and duration of each service.
- **Accommodations and Modifications:** It's important for a guide to distinguish between these two. **Accommodations** change *how* a student learns (e.g., extra time on a test, large-print materials), while **modifications** change *what* a student learns (e.g., a reduced number of problems on a test, a different curriculum).

- **Placement and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** The guide must explain that a student should be educated with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. This is known as the **LRE**. The guide should discuss the continuum of placements, from a general education classroom with support to a special day class or a separate school.
- **Transition Services:** For students aged 16 and older (or younger in some states), the IEP must include a transition plan. The guide should detail how to create measurable post-secondary goals related to education, employment, and independent living. It should also explain what services are needed to help the student achieve those goals.
- **Parent and Student Rights (Procedural Safeguards):** A comprehensive guide will dedicate a section to the rights of parents and students under IDEA, including the right to participate in meetings, receive prior written notice, and access dispute resolution options like mediation or a due process hearing.

## Reputable Resources for IEP Guides

Instead of a single PDF, here are some of the most reliable and regularly updated sources for comprehensive IEP guides:

- **Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR):** This organization provides a wealth of free, detailed resources for parents, including a comprehensive guide on developing a child's IEP. Their resources are often updated to reflect the latest legal and practical information.
- **U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP):** The federal government's own resources are a definitive source for understanding the legal requirements of IDEA. While some documents may be a few years old, the fundamental principles they describe remain the law.
- **Parent Training and Information (PTI) Centers:** Every state has at least one PTI center funded by the Department of Education. These centers are an excellent local resource for up-to-date, state-specific guides and one-on-one assistance.