

Strategies for a Successful and Collaborative IEP Meeting

during the IEP

Conducting the IEP Meeting

Navigating the complexities of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting requires a strategic and organized approach. In our previous section, “Before the IEP,” we focused on the [pre-planning phase](#), outlining steps to prepare effectively for the meeting. In this section, we will delve into the organization and logistics of the IEP meeting itself, ensuring a smooth and productive process. We will introduce the concepts of a student-centered and asset-



based IEP, emphasizing strategies that prioritize the strengths and needs of the student. Our suggestions and ideas aim to create an environment where the student's voice is central, fostering a collaborative and positive experience for everyone involved.

This section will review the following elements as part of “During the IEP” process:

- [Strategies to support student-centered and assets-based IEPs](#)
- [IEP meeting logistics](#)
 - [Agenda](#)
 - [Meeting norms](#)
 - [Conducting in-person meetings](#)
 - [Conducting virtual meetings](#)
- [Encouraging participation and meaningful engagement](#)

Strategies to Support Student-Centered and Asset-Based IEPs

A student-centered and assets-based IEP offers a fresh, holistic approach by focusing on the unique strengths, preferences, and interests of each student. Unlike the traditional IEP model, which often emphasizes areas of difficulty and prescribes interventions, this approach affirms and incorporates students' assets, interests, and agency. By celebrating students' strengths and recognizing their potential for growth, a student-centered IEP fosters a positive learning environment that values each individual's contributions. In addition, it promotes resilience and self-advocacy, empowering students to develop a sense of self-efficacy. In so doing, it lays the foundation for lifelong learning and success.

Here are some ideas to consider when developing a student-centered and asset-based IEP:

- 1. Identify strengths:** Include information from a variety of sources and people to identify the student's strengths, interests, preferences, and needs across various domains.
- 2. Asset-based goal setting:** Set goals that build upon the student's strengths and interests, rather than focusing solely on remediation of weaknesses. These goals capitalize on the student's assets and promote growth and development.
- 3. Asset-based interventions:** Design interventions and accommodations that leverage the student's strengths in support of their learning and development. This may involve incorporating their interests into the curriculum, providing opportunities for hands-on learning, or tapping into their talents to increase engagement and motivation.
- 4. Collaborative planning:** Involve all IEP team members in the planning process, including the student and parent(s), to ensure that goals and interventions align with the student's strengths and needs. Empower the student to take an active role in the IEP process by reflecting on their strengths, setting goals, and encouraging their participation in setting goals and decision-making. Their input is valuable in ensuring that the IEP reflects their needs, preferences, and aspirations.
- 5. Progress monitoring:** Continuously monitor the student's progress towards their goals and make adjustments to interventions as needed. Celebrating successes and growth reinforces the student's confidence and motivation.

Asset Based	Deficit Based
Strengths driven	Needs Driven
Opportunity focused	Problems focused
Internally focused	Externally focused
What is present that we can build upon?	What is missing that we must go find?
May lead to new, unexpected responses to community wishes	May lead to downward spiral of burnout, depression, or dysfunction

Green, G.P. and Haines, A. (2008), *Asset Building and Community Development*, 2nd Ed. Sage Publications, Los Angeles.



**PAUSE
AND REFLECT**

Have you been a part of an IEP meeting built on student strengths? If so, what strategies from that meeting would you like to try at your next meeting?

IEP Team Meeting Logistics

AGENDA

A well-prepared agenda made available to all team members at the start of the meeting helps keep the meeting focused and organized. The agenda ensures that all relevant topics are discussed, while facilitating productive collaboration among team members. It also helps manage time effectively and ensures the meeting runs smoothly, leading to a more successful and meaningful IEP process.

Here are some ideas to consider when using an IEP meeting agenda:

- **Follow the agenda:** Stick closely to the agenda to ensure all important topics are covered efficiently.
- **Monitor time:** Track time for each item to keep the meeting on schedule and allow thorough discussion.
- **Encourage participation:** Involve all team members in the discussion so everyone contributes.
- **Stay flexible:** Be prepared to adjust the agenda to include unexpected questions or concerns that may arise during the meeting.
- **Review and summarize:** Regularly summarize discussion points and decisions to keep everyone aligned and confirm mutual understanding.
- **Address parent concerns:** Allow time to address questions or concerns from parents, ensuring their input is considered.
- **Create an action plan:** If necessary, create an action plan that delineates follow-up items and the person responsible.

For more information on how to prepare an IEP meeting agenda, please refer to [Before the IEP: Preparing for the IEP Meeting](#).

Here is a [sample agenda](#) for you to consider using in your Local Education Agency (LEA).

An [annotated agenda](#) not only provides a clear flow to the meeting but, also explains each part of the meeting.



MEETING NORMS

Meeting norms are agreed-upon guidelines that ensure respectful and productive interactions, helping IEP team members stay focused and engaged while encouraging open communication. Implementing meeting norms fosters a positive and collaborative environment, enabling the team to work effectively in developing a comprehensive and meaningful plan for the student.

Here are some ideas to consider when using meeting norms during an IEP meeting:

- **Establish norms at the start:** Begin the meeting by establishing and/or reviewing norms. It is important to have agreement within the team.
- **Access:** Ensure the IEP team members have access to the agreed-upon norms throughout the meeting.
- **Student-centered focus:** Continuously prioritize the student's preferences, interests, needs, and goals in discussions, keeping the meeting centered on their educational outcomes.
- **Monitor adherence to norms:** Gently remind team members of the set norms if discussions veer off track or if interactions become less productive.
- **Summarize and reflect:** Periodically summarize key points and reflect on how well the team is adhering to the norms, making adjustments as needed to keep the meeting on track.

For more information regarding meeting norms, please refer to [Before the IEP: Preparing for the IEP Meeting](#).



II PAUSE AND REFLECT

Have you been a part of an IEP meeting that established and followed norms? If so, how did setting norms support respectful and productive interactions?

CONDUCTING IN-PERSON MEETINGS

The environment in which an IEP meeting is held can significantly impact the effectiveness and comfort of the participants. A welcoming, neutral setting encourages open dialogue and collaboration. The room should be spacious enough to accommodate all participants comfortably, with a table arrangement that promotes equality and easy communication. Avoid seating arrangements that isolate parent(s) or the student, as this can make them feel uncomfortable or marginalized.

Here are some considerations for conducting an in-person IEP meeting:

- Ensure that the interpreter is positioned to facilitate effective communication for the parent(s). For spoken languages, seat the interpreter next to the parent. For sign language, position the interpreter within the parent's line of sight.
- Create an environment that promotes collaboration and comfort (considerations may include seating arrangements, tissues, water, etc.).
- If available, provide participants a draft of the IEP.
- Make sure technology is set-up and working properly.
- Have pens, highlighters, sticky notes, etc. available.
- Periodically summarize key points and decisions to ensure clarity and mutual understanding among participants.
- Pay attention to participants' engagement levels. Check-in to ensure everyone is following along, has an opportunity to contribute, or are in need of a break.
- Ensure confidentiality is maintained throughout the meeting.



CONDUCTING VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Conducting a virtual IEP meeting requires careful planning and attention to detail to ensure a smooth and effective session. Virtual meetings enable educators, parents, and specialists to collaborate online using video conferencing platforms to develop, review, and update a student's IEP. Please refer to your local procedures and guidelines for conducting these meetings successfully.

Here are some ideas you might consider as you conduct a virtual IEP meeting:

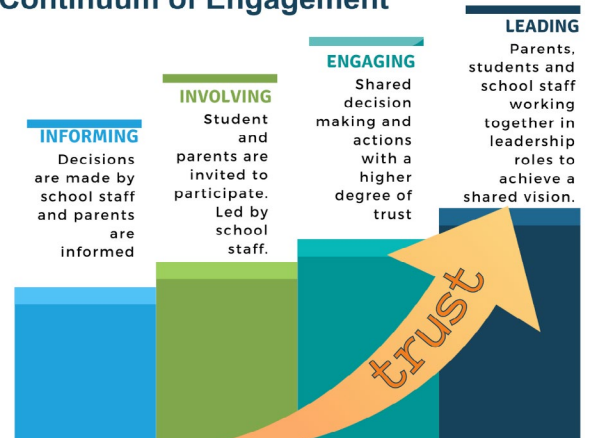
- Give parent(s) the opportunity to test the virtual platform and ask for assistance before the meeting, ensuring they are comfortable with the technology.
- Begin the meeting by sharing essential housekeeping information, such as how to mute/unmute, use the chat feature, etc.
- Pay attention to participants' engagement levels. Use visual cues and check-ins to ensure everyone is following along and has an opportunity to contribute.
- Periodically summarize key points and decisions to ensure clarity and mutual understanding among participants.
- Be prepared to offer real-time technical support if any participant experiences difficulties during the meeting.



ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION AND MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

Working together during the IEP meeting helps to foster family-school partnerships and encourages engagement. As educators, we can help to build opportunities for engagement during the IEP meeting. True engagement involves shared decision making and trust. It is critical to set the right tone at the outset of the IEP meeting.

Continuum of Engagement



GROUNDING THE IEP MEETING

Given the complexity of an IEP meeting and the deep emotional investment parents and students have in the process, it is important to acknowledge that IEP meetings can be stressful. Discussing a student's challenges and needs can be emotionally charged; negative past experiences may also contribute to stress and apprehension. These factors can lead some IEP team members to arrive at the meeting with reservations or stress. With this mind, how we start the meeting can help the team ground themselves in the here and now and move beyond past experiences and emotions. Consider the following [grounding activities](#) to set the right tone.

Activity	Explanation
Appreciation round	Have each member share one thing they appreciate about another team member or the student's progress. This fosters a positive atmosphere and highlights successes.
Favorite teaching/support strategies	Ask each participant, including the parent, to share a positive experience supporting the student.
Goal-setting activity	Start by having everyone share one goal they hope to achieve during the meeting. This aligns the team and sets a collaborative tone.
Quick check-in	Begin with a quick, informal check-in where each member shares one word or phrase that describes how they are feeling about the meeting. This can help acknowledge any existing emotions and create a supportive environment.

THROUGHOUT THE IEP

Working collaboratively during the IEP meeting helps to foster family-school partnerships. Review strategies outlined in the [Fostering Family-School Partnership](#) [handout](#).

High Quality IEP Toolkit for Educators: Special Education Providers Edition 01

Fostering Family-School Partnerships

Working together, whether with people or groups, offers many benefits that go beyond working alone. These partnerships yield heightened effectiveness, efficiency, resource-sharing, diverse perspectives, enhanced problem-solving capabilities, and avenues for learning and development.

Family and school partnerships are no different. Family and school collaborations share a common thread. Studies affirm that “meaningful family involvement can enhance academic achievements” across diverse student demographics, spanning racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, and foster smoother transitions into higher education and career paths (CDE engagement toolkit). Similarly, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has evolved over time to mandate parental/guardian involvement for students with disabilities. As educators, it’s not just a procedural obligation to involve families in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process; it’s crucial to cultivate genuine engagement to enhance student learning and outcomes. Establishing authentic engagement begins with nurturing trusting relationships.

Relationships evolve and have the opportunity to build trust when we share experiences with one another. As we interact, we increase our knowledge and understanding of the other person/people.

The graphic below demonstrates a continuum of engagement. As you will notice, as partnerships build between parents and educators so does the opportunity for strengthening the relationship and trust.

Continuum of Engagement

INFORMING	INVOLVING	ENGAGING	LEADING
Decisions are made by school staff and parents are informed	Student and parents are invited to participate. Led by school staff	Shared decision making and actions with a higher degree of trust	Parents, students and school staff working together in leadership roles to achieve a shared vision.

One way to build the engagement of our families and students is to build meaningful participation throughout the IEP journey. Creating opportunities throughout the IEP journey that reinforce a sense of belonging and value gives all participants the opportunity to co-create and work towards a shared vision.

The following pages offer ideas to cultivate meaningful participation through communication, empathy, respect, time, accessibility, flexibility, assuming goodwill, equity, opportunity, and curiosity. Imagine what these ideas can look and feel like when working with your parents and students. Educators are encouraged to reflect and add ideas.

High Quality IEPs

Fostering Family-School Partnerships | July/2024

Your feedback is vital as the user of this handout.
Please share your feedback on this [survey](#).