

IEP ^{and inclusion} TIPS

for Parents and Teachers

TIPS

- Discuss IEPs with your child...
- Organize your child's records...

Anne I. Eason, Attorney-at-Law
Kathleen Whitbread, Ph.D.

IEP

RESOURCES

**MASTER
VERSION**

Win/Mac CD-ROM

This CD-ROM contains a printable PDF of the entire book. You can review and print pages from your computer. This CD-ROM contains separate PDF files for each chapter in the book. To view the PDF files, open the **IEPTIPS.PDF** file and click the chapter you wish to view. You may also open each chapter file directly. Each PDF file includes Bookmarks allowing you to navigate to other chapters. The PDF (portable document format) file requires Acrobat Reader software.

- If you have **Acrobat Reader** already on your computer, run the program and then open the file using **IEPTIPS.pdf** from the CD-ROM.
- **To Install Acrobat Reader for Windows:** Run **ARINSTALL.EXE** provided on the CD-ROM. After installation, run Acrobat Reader then open using **IEPTIPS.pdf**
- **To install Acrobat Reader for Mac:** Run **Reader Installer**. After installation, open using **IEPTIPS.pdf**



Authors: Anne I. Eason and Kathy Whitbread

Editor: Tom Kinney

Graphic Design: Sherry Pribbenow

An Attainment Publication

© 2006, Attainment Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
Printed in the United States of America



P.O. Box 930160

Verona, Wisconsin 53593-0160

Phone 800-327-4269

Fax 800.942.3865

www.AttainmentCompany.com

ISBN 1-57861-570-4

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Authors4
Foreword6
Acknowledgments and Dedications 10
Introduction 12
 What Does the Research Say About Inclusive Education? 12
 Document Reproduction Rights 15
1 Getting Prepared for the IEP Meeting 17
2 The IEP 25
 Tips for What to Do During the IEP Meeting; Evaluations;
 Creating Legally Correct and Usable IEPs; Making Placement Decisions
3 Ensuring Access to the General Education Curriculum 41
 Curriculum Design and Modification; More Tips to Ensure Access; Bus Tips
4 Tracking Progress 49
 Tips to Monitor the IEP; Tips on Writing Measurable Goals and Objectives
5 On Friendships 53
6 Handling Disagreements 59
 Know How to Handle Difficult Conversations; More tips;
 Anne’s Strategies for “Sharpening the Saw”
**7 Forming Effective Partnerships Between Families
and Schools 69**
 Guide to Forming Effective Partnerships; Tips on How to Grow Inclusion Minded Staff
References 75
Favorite Websites 79

Foreword

by Mary A. Falvey, Ph.D.

This manual was written by two very distinguished professionals, Attorney Anne Eason and Professor Kathleen Whitbread. Both Anne and Kathleen are also Moms who have made inclusion work for their children with disabilities and numerous other children with disabilities throughout their community.

What makes this manual on inclusive education so effective, are the practical tips based upon the authors own experiences as well as upon best practices delineated in the professional literature. As a parent myself, I found this manual so useful and parent friendly, I feel deeply it should be made available to all parents of school-aged children with disabilities.

The manual begins with a concise, but very comprehensive description of research related to and legislative history of inclusive education. This foundation provides parents with an understanding that inclusive education is not only a right that their sons and daughters have, but also the most effective service delivery model for students with disabilities.

Inclusive education, an approach used extensively in some communities and schools and only minimally available to others, is the most effective method for teaching students with disabilities. Inclusive education, when implemented with appropriate supports results in students with disabilities learning skills such as reading, writing, math, social interactions, communication and many other important skills (Falvey, 2005). In addition, students who do not have disabilities but go to school with students with disabilities, learn to interact with their peers who are different from them in some ways, but the same in other ways. They learn about compassion and empathy, two very important characteristics of well-adjusted and contributing adults.

This manual provides parents with systematic strategies they can use to become more active participants in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process and contribute to the development of a meaningful educational program for their sons and daughters. The strategies delineated in this manual are not expensive nor do they require that parents obtain degrees in education or advocacy in order to be effective. The strategies offer common sense approaches as to how to effectively advocate for inclusive education for their sons and daughters with disabilities.

"As a parent myself, I found this manual so useful and parent friendly; I feel deeply it should be made available to all parents of school aged children with disabilities."

FOREWORD

Too often, professionals attending IEP meetings overwhelm parents with rules, regulations, and standardized assessment results. Professionals sometimes make the decisions about a student's goals and objectives and where he or she should go to school prior to the IEP meeting without ample input from the parents. As a result, parents are reluctant to offer their input since these critical decisions often have already been made. This manual provides parents with numerous strategies to ensure their input and build positive relationships with school professionals who work with their sons and daughters.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide very practical information on how parents can get prepared for their child's IEP meeting. The IEP is an important document since it drives services and supports necessary to make inclusion work for teachers and students alike. Numerous valuable tips are delineated in these two chapters that will assist in empowering parent to take a more active role in their child's IEP meeting.

Chapter 3, Ensuring Access to the General Education Curriculum describes an essential methodology required to make inclusion successful. It is not enough for students with disabilities to be physically included in general education classes; they must also be academically included. In order for academic inclusion to be successful, individualized supports, accommodations and adaptations must be provided to students based upon their needs (Falvey, 2005). This chapter includes an excellent delineation of these supports, accommodations, and adaptations.

Once a comprehensive and appropriate IEP is constructed with the genuine input of parents and students, the next step is to establish an appropriate method for systematically evaluating student progress over time. Assessment should not be about standardized test results that compare children to one another, but rather about painting a clear picture of a student so that appropriate supports and services can be made available to them and ongoing changes can be made based upon authentic assessment results. Chapter 4 provides parents with important information for evaluating student progress.

Having friends and being a friend are important roles for all children's development. Unfortunately, because of our traditional method of placing students with disabilities outside of their neighborhood schools, helping these

"This book provides parents with important information for evaluating student progress.

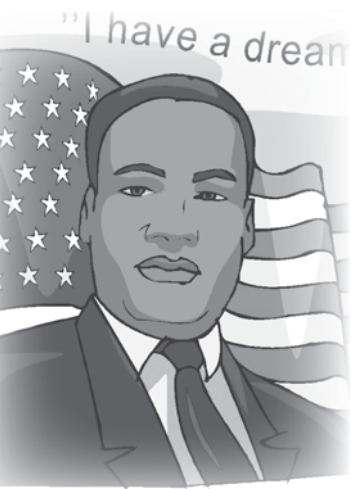
It also provides wonderful tips for parent to help their children form and maintain friendships with their peers . . . and has many suggestions for what parents might do to contribute to the building of positive interactions and effective teams."

students make friends and build friendship circles is negatively impacted by a segregated service delivery model (Falvey, 2005). Even students who attend their neighborhood schools sometimes experience difficulty in building and maintaining friendships. Chapter 5 provides wonderful tips for parent to help their children form and maintain friendships with their peers.

I have attended many team meetings, both IEP meetings as well as meetings for other purposes, sometimes as a friend of the student, sometimes as an advocate, sometimes as a teacher educator observing my student teachers participating in the meeting, sometimes as a parent, and sometimes as an aunt. Regardless of my role in these meetings, I have observed positive and negative interactions among and between the professionals and parents. The negative interactions have interfered with building positive educational outcomes for students with disabilities while the positive interactions generally yield positive educational outcomes because all the members of the team remained focused on the needs of the student rather than on their own egos. Teams of parents and educators who are committed to and use positive interaction styles are the most likely teams to be successful. Chapters 6 and 7 provide parents with numerous suggestions for what they might do to contribute to the building of positive interactions and effective teams. This chapter also includes sample notes and letters that parents can write to their child's teacher to foster the development of good communication and positive relationships.

Central to this book is the theme that parents are key to their children's success in school. If parents advocate for their sons and daughters throughout their schooling experiences, they will see them treated with respect and dignity while acquiring the skills necessary to be successful and building friendships with peers and others. If you use this book as a resource to help build your confidence and strength to advocate for your child's inclusion in their school and community, it will make an enormous difference in your child's life.

What Does the Research Say About Inclusive Education?



by Kathleen Whitbread, Ph.D.

The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was a precursor to legislation protecting the rights of children with disabilities to a public education. In the Supreme Court ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, Chief Justice Earl Warren, referring to segregation of children by race, stated:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments . . . it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity . . . is a right which must be made available on equal terms. We conclude that in the field of education, the doctrine “separate and equal” has no place (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954).

These same arguments, originally applied to race, have been repeated on behalf of children with disabilities, many of whom continue to be educated separately from their nondisabled peers despite legislation mandating otherwise (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

There is a strong research base to support the education of children with disabilities alongside their nondisabled peers. Although separate classes, with lower student to teacher ratios, controlled environments and specially trained staff would seem to offer benefits to a child with a disability, research fails to demonstrate the effectiveness of such programs (Lipsky, 1997; Sailor, 2003). There is mounting evidence that, other than a smaller class size, “there is little that is special about the special education system,” and that the negative effects of separating children with disabilities from their peers far outweigh any benefit to smaller classes (Audette & Algozzine, 1997).

Students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms show academic gains in a number of areas, including improved performance on standardized tests, mastery of IEP goals, grades, on-task behavior and motivation to learn (National Center for Education Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995). Moreover, placement in inclusive classrooms does not interfere with the academic performance of students without disabilities with respect to the amount of allocated time and engaged instructional time, the rate of interruption to planned activities and student achievement on test scores and report card grades (York, Vandercook, MacDonald, Heise-Neff, and Caughey, 1992).

“There is a strong research base to support the education of children with disabilities alongside their nondisabled peers.

Students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms show academic gains in a number of areas.”

INTRODUCTION

The types of instructional strategies found in inclusive classrooms, including peer tutoring, cooperative learning groups and differentiated instruction, have been shown to be beneficial to all learners. For example, Slavin, Madden, & Leavy (1984) found that math scores for students with and without disabilities increased by nearly half a grade level as a result of working in cooperative learning groups. Peer tutoring resulted in significant increases in spelling, social studies and other academic areas for students with and without disabilities (Maheady et al, 1988; Pomerantz et al, 1994). The use of graphic organizers, study guides, and computer accommodations resulted in significantly improved performances on tests and quizzes for students with and without disabilities (Horton, Lovitt, & Berglund, 1990). In addition, children with intellectual disabilities educated in general education settings have been found to score higher on literacy measures than students educated in segregated settings (Buckley, 2000).

Quality inclusive education doesn't just happen. Educating children with disabilities in general education settings with access to the general education environment requires careful planning and preparation (Deno, 1997; King-Spears, 1997; Scott, Vitale, & Masten, 1998). Research shows that principals, special education directors, superintendents, teachers, parents and community members must all be involved and invested in the successful outcome of inclusive education (Villa, 1997; Walther-Thomas, 1997). Teachers — both general and special education — must collaborate to create learning strategies and environments that work for all students. Related service personnel, including speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists and school psychologists will be expected to deliver their services in the general education environment rather than in pull-out rooms and will need to incorporate their services into the general education curriculum and schedule (Ferguson, Ralph, & Katul, 1998). Educators must rethink assessment, as No Child Left Behind and IDEA 2004 both call for more extensive evaluation of student progress, including the use of standardized assessment.

Research highlights the benefits of efforts on the part of schools to find meaningful and creative ways for parents of children with disabilities to participate and contribute in the school community (Ryndak & Downing, 1996.) The benefits of strong family-school partnerships are well documented in the literature. Student academic achievement is higher when parents are involved; in fact, the higher the level of parent involvement, the higher the level of student achievement

“Quality inclusive education doesn't just happen. Educating children with disabilities in general education settings with access to the general education environment requires careful planning and preparation.”

INTRODUCTION

“Student academic achievement is higher when parents are involved; in fact, the higher the level of parent involvement, the higher the level of student achievement.”

(Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Other benefits of strong family-school collaboration include improved student attendance, higher aspirations for postsecondary education and career development (Caplan, et. al., 1997), improved social competence, (Webster-Stratton, 1993) and lower rates of high-risk behavior on the part of adolescents (Resnick et al., 1997).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) strongly emphasizes the involvement of families at every step of the special education process, from referral to evaluation, to Individualized Education Program (IEP) development, to monitoring progress. Yet, many parents of students with disabilities are not fully participating members of their child’s IEP Team. Data from the first year of the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) as part of the national assessment of the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 97), showed that:

- Nearly 90 percent of elementary and middle school students with disabilities had a family member attend their IEP meeting but only two-thirds of parents reported collaborating with school district personnel on the IEP development.
- Parents of students with specific learning disabilities and speech/language impairment were the least likely to attend IEP meetings or training sessions. Since these two disability categories comprise 70 percent of all students (ages 6-21) served under IDEA, the SEELS study implies that the majority of students with disabilities have the least involved families.
- Only 25 percent of students had an adult family member who had participated in an informational or training session on understanding their rights and responsibilities under IDEA. Those who attended viewed the meetings as very helpful (49%) or somewhat helpful (44%).

“Nearly 90 percent of elementary and middle school students with disabilities had a family member attend their IEP meeting but only two-thirds of parents reported collaborating with School district personnel on the IEP development.”

A national survey by Public Agenda, When Its Your Child: A Report on Special Education from the Families Who Use It, revealed that a large majority (70%) of the parents surveyed say that too many children with special needs lose out because their parents don’t know what’s available to them. More than half (55%) said that parents have to find out on their own what services and supports are available. This finding underscores the need to provide more training and information to parents on how the special education process works and their rights under IDEA.

A lack of information about the special education process can lead to conflicts between parents and schools. In studies of conflict resolution in special education, breakdowns of communication between parents and schools were often caused by “parents not being adequately informed as to what limits are contained in IDEA and School district personnel not being adequately informed about the extent and complexity of the . . . federal statues and regulations” (Feinberg, et al. 2002).

This book is our attempt to provide parents with tips and strategies for making inclusive education a reality for their children. It is our hope that these tips will prove useful for families as they advocate for their children, and will allow parents to come to the IEP table as true and equal partners in the IEP process.

Chapter 1

Getting Prepared for the IEP Meeting


Productive and successful IEP meetings require careful preparation on the part of all team members. Parents who arrive at their child's IEP meeting without doing their homework risk leaving the meeting without a full understanding of what they agreed to, or worse, having agreed to things they feel are not in the best interests of their child. In order to participate fully and confidently in the IEP meeting, parents must be educated about the process, be familiar with all the key players, and in possession of all the information needed to make knowledgeable decisions about their child.

*"In the middle
of difficulty lies
opportunity."*

Albert Einstein

*"Before anything else,
preparation is the key
to success."*

Alexander Graham Bell



1 Communicate with your child. Ask how school is going. Ask your child what he or she would like to change, what they would like to be different in school. Find out what they like and dislike. Ask them what they want and what they need.

Not all children with disabilities are verbal. If necessary, alternative means of communication are available and should be accessed.

2 Be prepared to share relevant information about your child with the team. Consider putting together a portfolio of your child's home experiences, including photos or videos of your child engaging in family life and activities.

3 Be sure to write down any questions you may have before the meeting so you do not forget. These questions can be part of a written agenda you submit to the school before the meeting.



4 Call or make an appointment to introduce yourself to each of your child's teachers. Don't forget the "specials" teachers (art, music, physical education, etc.) and related services staff (occupational therapist, speech therapist, physical therapist, etc.). Find out from them how they think your child is doing at school, what their concerns are, and what help or resources they may need to do their job. Ask them to share their vision for your child for next year.

5 Visit your child's classroom. Visit the cafeteria during lunch, visit the playground to see what happens at recess. Observe what's going on with your child in all settings while they are at school (but don't overstay your welcome and respect the teacher's space).

6 Organize all records pertaining to your child. It is helpful to put records in a three-ring binder, arranged either chronologically, or by section (evaluations, IEPs, report cards, etc).

Some people like to put the most recent information on top. I like putting it on the bottom, so my records read like a book, especially if you are putting the records in a binder.

— Anne



GETTING PREPARED FOR THE IEP MEETING

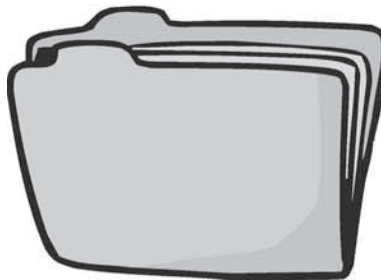
7 Keep good records of all communication in connection with your child. After each telephone call or meeting, write down everything that was said, creating a contemporaneous business record. Get into the habit of documenting each important conversation with a follow-up letter but respect each teacher's busy schedule. Don't burden them with unnecessary contacts.



8 Review last year's records and the current IEP.

9 Do you have all the information you need about your child?

Read all of the prior evaluations. Decide if additional evaluations are needed and how that information will be obtained. Do you fully understand your child's diagnosis? Do you understand the words used in the reports? Don't be afraid to ask someone to explain any jargon. Get a written copy of the results of any assessments. If needed, schedule a meeting with the appropriate school personnel to discuss assessment results.



*"Two roads
diverged in a
wood and I took
the one less
traveled by,
and that has
made all the
difference."*

Robert Frost

- 10** Bring in any evaluations that were done privately if you want the school team to consider them. Make sure they have copies at least 5 days in advance of the meeting so they have time to review them. Remember, by law, the team only has to consider the evaluation, not follow the recommendations.

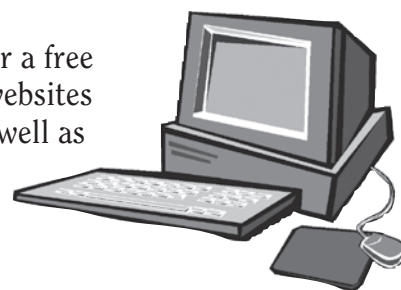


- 11** If you disagree with the school's evaluation, you may request (in writing) an independent educational evaluation at the district's expense. The district is required to pay for the evaluation unless they are willing to bring you to a due process hearing to prove that their evaluation was appropriate.

- 12** Prior to the IEP meeting, let the school know in writing what you will be recommending for your child. Send in a proposed agenda. Be clear on what your expectations are. Bring documentation of what your child needs to be successful in school.

- 13** Check to see who has been invited to the IEP. Is everyone who is important to your child's educational program going to be there? Is everyone who is legally required to be there planning to attend? Think carefully before you allow someone to be excused. Check the law to see who is required to be at the meeting. Let the school know if you are planning to bring someone to the meeting.

- 14** Know your rights. Download or write for a free copy of the IDEA and read it. Visit the websites for the US Department of Education as well as your State Department of Education (SDE). Sign up for training to learn about your legal rights. Become empowered with knowledge.



*Familiarize yourself with the laws regarding special education.
You can obtain free copies of IDEA from the US Dept of Education*



and a copy of your state's special education regulations from your SDE. If you don't understand the law, call the SDE and speak to a representative. There are consultants who can answer your questions and explain the process in straightforward terms.

15 Speak with other parents about their IEP meetings. Ask them if they will share their experiences. Get their impressions (both positive and negative) of the services they received. Participate in local parent groups so you have a network of parents to rely on. You will benefit from hearing about other parents' experiences.

16 Consider placement in regular education for your child. A regular class placement, commonly called "inclusion," is defined by Office of Special Education Programs as 80% or more of the day in a regular class. Don't be afraid to insist that this be considered. The law says that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities shall be educated in their neighborhood schools and attend regular classes (the classes he or she would have attended if born without a disability) with supplemental aids and services necessary for success. There is ample research to show that inclusion is good for all kids — with and without disabilities. Make the commitment and decide what supports your child needs to be successful. It is never too late to start.



"Speak with other parents about their IEP meetings. Get their impressions (both positive and negative)."

Sample letter

March 9, 2005

Mr. Sigmund Freud, School Psychologist
My Middle School
New Canaan, CT 06840

Re: FERPA Request for all of Ivy Smith's records

Dear Mr. Freud,

In preparation for Ivy's upcoming IEP, I am requesting a copy of all of her records since she began kindergarten in September 1999. I am entitled to these records under FERPA, The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, and IDEA.

Please include all of her records, which include but are not limited to: Her cumulative file, her confidential file, and her compliance file. Include all records generated by the school, as well as records that came to school with Ivy, and any records sent to the school or obtained from any source. Please include all reports written as a result of the school's evaluations; reports of independent evaluations; medical records; summary reports of evaluation team and eligibility committee meetings; IEP's; any correspondence retained between myself and the school officials; any correspondence written between school personnel regarding my daughter; any records maintained by the school nurse, Ivy's teachers, and any member of the IEP team; notes or letters written in connection with any planning or discussions, or any other matters in connection with my daughter Ivy Smith. Please include any and all personally identifiable information that exists.

Thanks in advance for your cooperation.

Very truly yours,

Anne Smith

123 Main Street
New Canaan, CT 06840

Tel: (203) 966-1234
Fax: (203) 966-5678
Smith55@aol.com

- 17** Write a letter to get copies of all of your child's records prior to the IEP meeting. Parents must have as much information about their child as is possible in order to be full participants in the IEP process; their participation must be meaningful. You have a right to this information under IDEA as well as under FERPA (Family Education Rights and Privacy Act).



FERPA provides access to the records not necessarily a "copy" of them. Clarify with your school district first.

- 18** Create a vision statement for your child. Don't be afraid to dream. Having a big picture in your mind will help put small pieces in place.

