

Using Facilitated IEP Team Meetings to Reach Special Education Agreements

WHAT IS A FACILITATED IEP (FIEP)

Parents and schools in Alabama have the option of using facilitated IEP (FIEP) team meetings to resolve disagreements. It is voluntary, meaning that both parties must agree to participate. This option is not required under Part B of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), but has proven to be an effective alternate form of dispute resolution. This process uses an independent, state-approved, trained facilitator who assists the parents and school to communicate candidly and effectively to resolve disagreements about the student's IEP. It is the same as a regular IEP meeting, except that a facilitator joins the meeting.

BENEFITS OF FIEP MEETINGS

The goal of a facilitated IEP meeting is to develop an IEP that is supported by team members and benefits the student. The facilitator uses skills in communication and listening to work with the IEP team to identify points on which they agree and disagree. The facilitator can build and improve relationships among IEP team members, encourage members to consider new options to address unresolved problems, keep the team focused on the student, and doesn't require a separate IEP meeting to formalize any agreement reached. As with any IEP meeting, a FIEP meeting is provided at no cost to the parents.



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WHO SHOULD ATTEND FIEP

In addition to the trained facilitator, members of the usual IEP team should attend, including the parents, regular and special education teachers, a school district representative, and someone who can explain how evaluation results are reflected in the student's IEP. You can also invite people with special knowledge or expertise regarding the student. The student can also attend if appropriate to discuss transition goals.

REQUESTING A FIEP

When difficult issues arise and breakdown in communication occurs, parents and schools may be unable to agree on an IEP that meets the student's needs. Either party may request a facilitator, but both parties must agree upon the use of a facilitator. A form to request a Facilitated IEP Team Meeting is available on the Alabama State Department of Education website, and must be completed and signed by both parents and schools to begin the process. An independent trained facilitator will be assigned from a roster on a rotating basis and an IEP meeting will be scheduled for a time and place that is mutually agreed upon.

FACILITATORS ARE NOT DECISION-MAKERS

IEP team members are the decision-makers. The facilitator is not a member of the IEP team or an

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advocate for any person on the team. Their responsibility is to the whole team rather than an individual, by establishing ground rules that provide structure and focus for the meeting. They guide the discussion by asking student-focused questions such as: how is the student doing? What changes should be made to the goals? How can we help the student reach his/her goals and objectives? The facilitator keeps the team members on task and within the scheduled timeframe. They ask questions to clarify points of disagreement and help identify workable solutions. They help ensure that the language in the IEP reflects what the team discussed and agree upon.

BE PREPARED

Make a list of the issues you want to discuss and questions you want to ask. Think about what is important to your child and their needs. Organize your documents, put dates and notes on them, and bring extra copies. Be willing to listen and carefully consider other's ideas. Be early for the meeting.

REACHING AN AGREEMENT

The goal is to develop an IEP that meets the needs of the student. If issues, disagreements, or problems are not resolved, you may want to consider mediation or another form of dispute resolution. Your participation in the IEP does not affect your parental rights.

NEED MORE INFORMATION

Alabama Department of Education, Special Education Services www.alsde.edu

Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education www.cadeworks.org

U.S. Department of Education, IDEA <https://sites.ed.gov/idea>

APEC IS HERE TO HELP

APEC provides free training, information, and consultation to families. Visit our training calendar for more formation about learning opportunities at www.alabamaparentcenter.com or call our center.

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YOUR OPINION MATTERS

Your opinion matters. Please take a few moments to tell us what you think by completing a short survey about this sheet or other services of the AL-PTI. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ALPTI>



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