

# Inquire 2 Inspire: Practical Participation in the IEP

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As we prepare for the spring semester at school, many parents and educators will begin planning for upcoming Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Did the mere mention of IEP make the hair on your neck stand up? Did you start to shiver in your shoes? In this edition, I2I explores a common inquiry regarding parent participation in the IEP. Read on to learn how parents in our community have been involved in the process and how professionals in the field encourage them to be practical participants.

I always felt my position as a team member was unique because I served as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and classroom teacher simultaneously. I loved seeing the child as a whole, looking at each academic area while addressing Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) areas and needs related to visual impairments. Part of our paperwork included a document entitled “Parent Considerations to the IEP.” In just a few short questions, parents were encouraged to discuss the strengths and

challenges for their child and desired goals for the upcoming year. Receiving this document allowed me to address parent concerns and anticipate points of contention related to goal development. Having the input beforehand allowed me to address expectations prior to the meeting under neutral conditions.

Now, let’s hear from some other parents and professionals regarding their experiences with the IEP process.

Some parents find it confusing to understand the IEP process and their role on the team. When developing an IEP, the first consideration must be the evaluation. As teachers, we know that a good evaluation leads to a good IEP. Your input into the evaluation is invaluable because students exhibit different behaviors across settings. Request the evaluation before the meeting so your questions and concerns can be addressed.

As an Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialist, I’ve used a variety of methods to

foster a stronger relationship with parents. I want the parent to trust me with their child and will go out of my way to show them I have their child's best interest at heart. I try to meet face-to-face on a regular basis, and I like to have them observe a lesson, or I have it videotaped and schedule a home visit to show both parent and child the lesson. Meeting the parent and child somewhere in the community is also a great opportunity to show off the student's abilities or discuss issues. – Marjie W.

A great way for parents to get involved is to learn about the special education system and what quality services look like for your child. You can do this by joining parent groups, such as your local chapter of the National Association of Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI). You can also attend Special Education 101 training offered in your school district or education service center. Knowing about your child's disability and the supports and services available to help her access the general education curriculum will give you the information you need to meaningfully participate in the IEP process. – Amanda F.

You are your child's greatest advocate, so it's important for you to stay involved in the IEP process! As a parent of a child with albinism and a TVI, I think there are two important points to keep in mind.

First, you are a part of the team, so your voice is as important as each voice around that table. Be inquisitive and stay upbeat to set a productive tone. Team implies that you are working together, so assume that you will be treated with respect, and work with everyone to make the best decisions for your child.

Second, do your research. If you think your child needs a specific accommodation, low vision aid or piece of technology, make sure you are able to explain why. For example, just wanting a device does not mean that the district has to provide one. Explaining how the

device will allow your child access to materials that he is not currently able to access will entice the district to listen carefully and take the consideration seriously. – Gianna G.

Bring a friend whose only job is to take notes. I was happy that someone I trusted was documenting the overwhelming amount of information being presented so I could concentrate on the discussions. In some places, you have to submit a written request to receive the assessment reports before the IEP rather than getting them for the first time at the meeting. Check with your school to stay updated on policies. It is invaluable to read them before the meeting instead of struggling to process them in the moment. – Meredith W.

I stay involved by asking to meet with some of the team members individually prior to the IEP meeting to discuss their goals as well as ours. This is helpful since the "big" meeting can sometimes feel overwhelming. It's nice for everyone to put a face to the name. – Ripple M.

Throughout the school year, we check in with our son's service providers via email or a face-to-face meeting to review goal progress. We also ask service providers to share things we can do at home to support the goals they are working on at school. Feedback from our son is also important, and we often ask if there is anything that he needs help with or if there is a lesson that he finds helpful and would like to continue.

A few weeks prior to the IEP meeting we meet with each service provider and the classroom teacher to discuss the next year's proposed goals. At that time, we share goals that we would like to focus on during the IEP meeting and discuss edits to proposed goals. We also meet with the case manager prior to the IEP meeting to discuss the meeting's agenda. At this time, we share our parent report, review goals we have been working on at home, parent concerns, and any vision changes we may have noticed. – Jill G.



I have developed a great relationship with my son's TVI over the last eight years. Additionally, his Gifted and Talented teacher has worked with him for three years. Between the three of us, we rally other teachers to get involved throughout the year so when it is time for his IEP, nothing is a surprise. Last year, my son not only attended the meeting, but he also had a say during the planning process. It was very exciting for us all. – Patti Z.

I always request that the proposed goals, service times and accommodations one week in advance so I have time to ask questions and request changes. I also bring a picture of my daughter to annual meetings. I place it on the table and remind the team that we are discussing this child, not "fixing" a situation on paper. Every year, the team gets excited to see the newest picture, especially last year when she wore a shirt saying, "I am the 'I' in IEP!"

When asked if I have any concerns, I always start with positives for each person working with my daughter, even when I have to stretch to find them. I feel this step is critical and will empower them to continue to do their best for her. I extend this throughout the year by sending emails to her team members thanking them for investing in my daughter's success. I feel it helps to keep everyone motivated.

Lastly, I ensure that we address educational implications for her future so I can stay ahead of the curve. In the end, I am her only advocate, and I take that job very seriously! I choose to educate myself to the fullest so I can be prepared to attend meetings. This drive led me to become a TVI. I try to give her the tools to advocate for herself, and when I get a call about what's best for her, I empower teachers to ask my daughter, since ultimately, the decisions affect her. – Summer G.

And lastly, the best advice ever! Take doughnuts! They make everyone warm and fuzzy and feel cared for, and they keep them wanting to please you! – Mindy H.

Thanks to everyone for such great advice! Although there are many statements on social media regarding the stress of IEP meetings or expressing disappointment with instructional team members, it's important to keep things in perspective. Remember, the ultimate goal for everyone is to serve the child. I hope this article has inspired you to get involved with your child's IEP in a practical and productive way.

Now it's YOUR turn to inquire to inspire. Send your questions with regard to issues faced by individuals in the albinism community to [i2i@albinism.org](mailto:i2i@albinism.org).

# CARE

IFSPs  
IEPs  
504s

*Creating an Albinism Resource for Education*

NOAH's CARE program collects education plans from early childhood intervention through high school:

- IFSPs for students three and under
- IEP for students age three to graduation
- 504 accommodation plans

Personal information is removed then the content is indexed by state and grade at [iep.albinism.org](http://iep.albinism.org). This free resource aids in establishing a child's Individualized Education Plan. Our resource is only as good as the input we receive so please, consider sharing with CARE.