

## Ask the Advocate... by Desiree Vandelac

### Basic IEP Meeting and Advocacy Strategies

Over the next few months I will be writing a series titled "The ABC's of IEP". With these articles I hope to quell the feelings of anxiety and dread that all too often accompany IEP meetings. While the tips I will be providing are by no means exhaustive, they can get you moving in the right direction to enable the IEP meeting to be what it is supposed to be: A meeting to permit all of the members of your child's IEP team (including you) the opportunity to sit down and engage in an open and free discussion to ensure your child is receiving the services he/she needs.

The IEP meeting is supposed to be an opportunity to revisit the IEP, address problems or concerns that have arisen and make any necessary adjustments and changes to the IEP. Unfortunately, IEP meetings can be quite intimidating for many parents.

First, you enter a conference room-- for some reason that room is frequently in or near the principal's office which coincidentally brings up all of those long buried feelings of childhood dread at being sent to the principal's office for some misbehavior or another. Upon entering the conference room, you are immediately surrounded by multiple school district employees who are purported to be "the experts". If all of this isn't enough to elevate your blood pressure and heighten your "fight or flight response", the IEP meeting is often the "battleground" where parents' concerns are voiced and where conflicts and disagreements often take place.

Too often parents enter the IEP meeting indeed feeling as if they are going into "battle" and if that is not bad enough they feel as if they are going in "unarmed". I truly hope this series will help to alleviate those feelings and allow you to become more involved and confident in the IEP process.

As I have said before and will say many times again, YOU are the expert on YOUR child. YOU are an equal and critical member of the IEP team! Your child is counting on you! Teachers, speech therapists, occupational therapists, IEP care coordinators will come and go, some member or another of the IEP team will change every year. You are the one constant factor in the IEP process. It is up to you to ensure your child receives the services he/she needs to allow him/her the ability to meaningfully benefit from his/her education.

While this may seem overwhelming, remember you are not alone in this process and as time goes on and you become a strong and effective advocate for your child, you will come to appreciate your role as your child's strongest ally.

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