

5 Questions to Ask About Your Child's IEP

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) lays out exactly how your school will support your child's unique strengths and challenges, so they can thrive in school. The IEP is legally binding, meaning that the school is required to provide the types of support that are identified in the document. As a parent, you have the right to know exactly what the IEP says, how your school is going to help your child grow and learn, and how your child is progressing.

But IEPs can be confusing, and it can be overwhelming to figure out what they say and what it all means in practice. To start, here are five questions to ask school if your child receives services through an IEP.

HOW IS MY CHILD DOING RIGHT NOW?

Your child's teachers should be able to tell you specifically where your child is doing well, and where they need support. The details will depend on your child, of course, but ask for specifics, because those details will define the kinds of support your child will receive. For example, if the school tells you that your child is reading two years below grade level, you'll want to know if your child is experiencing difficulty decoding words, focusing on the task at hand, seeing the words on the page, or something else: Many challenges could result in reading below grade level, but each requires different supports.

HOW WILL MY CHILD'S DAY LOOK DIFFERENT AS A RESULT OF THEIR IEP?

IEPs should make a tangible difference in your child's daily school experience. Your school administrators should be able to tell you, for example, "She will

have a special education teacher in reading class who will help her access the text so she can participate in the classroom discussion.”

WHAT DOES PROGRESS LOOK LIKE FOR MY CHILD?

Your child’s IEP goals should be specific enough to include the skills they’ll develop over time, as well as the teacher actions that will support them to get there. For example, if a goal is to be able to multiply whole numbers, supports might include the use of graphic organizers or manipulatives to break down the multiplication process. Consider asking what you can do to support your child’s progress at home, too, so everyone is on the same page.

HOW WILL THE SCHOOL ASSESS MY CHILD’S LEARNING PROGRESS?

Make sure you understand what assessments your child’s teachers will use to measure their learning, how often progress is measured, and what they will do to address bumps along the way. Progress might be measured by periodic benchmark testing (like Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Achievement Network (ANet), or other similar assessments), observations and work products, or grades. If grades are used as a measure of progress, you’ll also want to know how your school approaches them: How are grades assigned? What components go into a given grade? Are they based on standards for your child’s grade level?

HOW WILL THE IEP MAKE MY CHILD’S EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOL BETTER?

Students who struggle in school often feel like these challenges are their own fault: They may internalize a negative self-image or have a hard time connecting with their peers. (Or they may not!) But an IEP shouldn’t address academics or behavior in isolation. Ask how your child’s teachers are thinking about the impact of their disability on their overall well-being, and how they will support *all* areas of your child’s needs so your child can thrive.