

Center for Autism and Related Disabilities

University of Florida/Gainesville

IEP PART 3 Alphabet Soup Transcript

Hello and welcome to the third in a series of five presentations on the ins and outs of the IEP process. This series was developed to introduce the concept of IEPs to families who are navigating IEPs for the first time, but it may also serve as a reference guide for those who need a reminder or a “brush up” on specific components of IEP planning. It has been divided into five parts so that viewers have the option of watching which ever parts are useful to them. We hope you find this series helpful. So let’s get started.

Before we begin, I think it’s important to share a short disclaimer about the intended audience for this series. The content presented here was written for families of children who are eligible for IEP services. However, we welcome and encourage anyone who has an interest in IEPs and their development to participate. Hopefully professionals will find that learning about IEPs from the family’s perspective is a useful way to help ensure family participation and satisfaction with the process.

Each of the five presentations in this series will cover a specific, and relatively succinct range of topics so that participants can choose the presentations that address the topics of their specific interest. The purpose of this presentation, the third in the series, is to familiarize you with a bit of background on special education law, known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA. We will also spend some time deciphering some of the most common acronyms associated with the IEP process. Let’s start now.

There are two primary take home messages that we’d like you to have when you finish this training. The first is to be able to explain the purpose of IDEA. We would also like you to be able to define three of the most common acronyms in the IEP process: LRE, FAPE, and IEP. Here we go.

As you begin the IEP process, it’s important to have a sense of the history of IDEA, the law that mandates IEPs for students with special needs. Originally, the law was called the Education for All Handicapped Children’s Act. It was the first law of its kind; it made education available to all students regardless of disability. Before this, schools were allowed to exclude students with special needs. The name of the law was later changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, which was first introduced in 1990 and amended in 1997 and 2004.

There are actually two types of documents for children with special needs. For children ages birth to three, the law mandates the use of an IFSP, which is an individualized family service plan. Once children reach school age, or three through 21 years old, the appropriate document is the IEP, or the Individual Education Plan.

In order to qualify for an IEP, a child must have at least one of the following qualifications. Note that there is a category called “other health impairments.” This category might be used for disabilities not listed here that have demonstrated a negative impact on the child’s learning.

So let’s now begin with a rundown of the common acronyms associated with IDEA and IEPs. You should definitely hear the term LRE during your child’s IEP meeting. LRE stands for least restrictive environment. A quote from IDEA states that [READ]

What this really means is that your child must be educated in the school environment that is the closest to the general education setting for as much time as appropriate given his or her needs AND with provisions for supports and services. In other words, your child must be educated in the general education setting unless it has been determined that, given all the necessary supports, your child’s needs are not able to be met there.

FAPE stands for free and appropriate public education. Simply put, this means that your child with a disability has GUARANTEED access to both academic and nonacademic activities within the school setting. A child cannot be excluded from any activity because of his or her disability.

IEP, as you know, stands for individual education plan, sometimes also called an individual education program. Part B of the law states that all school-age students (from the time the child turns three until he or she turns 22) are entitled to a free and appropriate public education utilizing individualized supports. That’s where the IEP comes in; it ensures that the education being provided to your child is appropriate for meeting his or her individual needs. Every IEP must include the elements listed here [READ].

As I mentioned earlier, an IFSP is the document used for children ages zero through two, or until the child turns three and is eligible for an IEP. IFSPs, which are mandated in Part C of IDEA, are similar to IEPs in that they are written to individually meet a child’s needs, but since the children are so young at this time, IFSPs also accommodate needs and supports for the family members as well.

An ITP or Individual Transition Plan is what is used for students who are beginning the transition out of school-age services. At around age 14, the team starts developing goals for what will happen after the child has aged out of school services at 22 years old. When this happens, the child is no longer eligible for an IEP. An ITP is used to document how the team will help the child prepare for whatever will follow school, whether it may be college, job or volunteer placement, special interests and hobbies. The ITP should also be used to work on independent living skills, ways in which the individual can access the community, and options for housing.

A 504 plan is similar to an IEP in that it documents supports that help a student be successful in school. There are several differences, though. First of all, a 504 is typically a much less formal and much less comprehensive document. Instead of being mandated by IDEA, 504s are part of the civil rights law known as the Rehabilitation Act. Also, unlike the IEP, a 504 is a support document that can follow a person throughout his or her lifetime; it does not just address school-based needs. Schools do not receive extra funding for implementing 504 plans like they do IEPs, but 504 plans do allow for documentation of accommodations and modifications.

As we described in presentation number 2 of this series, the PLOP is the present level of performance. This is a thorough description of what your child can currently do (typically without supports) across all learning domains, academic, social and communication, behavior, and independent or adaptive skills. In addition to describing mastered skills, sometimes a PLOP will also indicate what skills are currently “in progress” for your child, meaning what skills he or she is currently work on but has not yet mastered. The PLOP is important because it helps set the stage for what will come next. These next steps become the goals and objectives on the IEP.

Another important acronym you might hear is ADA. ADA stands for the Americans with Disabilities Act. This simply means that federal law prohibits any individual from being discriminated against, at school, in the workplace, or in the community, because they have a disability. As you can see, the ADA defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.

Throughout your child’s school years, you may also hear the term FBA. An FBA is a functional behavioral assessment. This is a formal assessment conducted when your child’s behavior interferes with his learning or the learning of another student. The purpose of an FBA is to determine the function, reason, or purpose for your child’s behavior. We often look at patterns of behavior through observation and interview with people who know the child well. We can identify function by looking at patterns of triggers of behavior and the history of consequences associated with the behavior. If your child’s team is going to recommend a Behavior Intervention Plan or BIP, an FBA should be conducted by a qualified professional first. In this case a qualified professional is a certified behavior analyst (BCBA) or possibly a school behavior resource specialist or school psychologist.

After an FBA has been conducted, a BIP, or behavior intervention plan, is written. This is a formal plan, like an IEP, which documents how a challenging behavior will be addressed. A BIP should include a hypothesis about why the behavior is occurring (the function) and strategies to prevent the behavior or eliminate the triggers of behavior. The BIP should also state how the child will be taught new skills that replace the inappropriate behaviors and how the team will respond to both inappropriate and appropriate behaviors. Like an IEP, there should be documentation of who will implement strategies, who will collect data on progress, who will analyze the data, and when the team will meet again to discuss how things are progressing.

RTI is a relatively new term in IEPs. It stands for response to intervention. This means that a multi-tiered approach to teaching and learning should be used and that those who are struggling should be identified and supported as soon as possible. As you can see here, there are four main considerations when evaluating RTI: highly-qualified instruction, ongoing assessment of student performance, tiered instruction (which is more individualized), and parent involvement.

ESY stands for extended school year. Depending on your child's needs, it may be determined by the school team that he or she needs to attend school over the summer break. Typically, this decision is made when the team is concerned that the child will lose his or her skills over a long break from school. A typical ESY plan is a modified version of an IEP that documents a smaller number of goals to be addressed during the summer months. The school team meets to decide what goals are the most important to focus on during this shortened time period, and goals are selected from the original IEP.

Remember that at any time during the IEP process, or during any conversation with anyone associated with your child's education, never be afraid to ask someone to clarify what they mean if they are speaking in educational jargon. Sometimes professionals forget that as parents, you might not talk this way every day.

We hope you have enjoyed part 3 of the IEP series. There are two more trainings in this series. We hope you will join us!