



# Handy Hints and IEP Tips for Parents

## Pre-meeting

**Reach out to schools before the start of the school year** if you haven't heard from them by one week prior to the start of school. **Consider sending (or helping your child to write & send) an "Intro to My Child" letter** to all of their teachers. You may want to - attach a picture of your child to the letter! Sharing information and your observations about your child will help your case manager understand their unique needs for a strong start to the school year. keep your child's needs a priority to their case manager.

**Track all contact** you have with the school staff - keep a phone log, send follow up emails summarizing phone calls, track the dates and times that your child receives various related services

**Request who the staff and specialists that you would like to have in attendance at your meeting.** If you want related service providers, FCPS specialists, PSLs or other specific FCPS staff in attendance, notify the school team ASAP. If you want to bring a non-parent (friend, advocate, etc), also notify the school team in advance; before the meeting begins, you will be required to sign a consent form for them to attend.

**Set up communication expectations with school staff** -- What will your child's schedule look like, including related services? How will you and staff be in communication, including how often & by what method?

**Request that a draft of the IEP and any pertinent materials and data be sent to you at least 3 days in advance of the IEP meeting.** This will give you time to carefully review and make notes of any questions, concerns or ideas you have about the IEP and your child's current needs.

**Prepare yourself:** What are your child's strengths & weaknesses? Consider academic, social, emotional, and physical aspects of school. Where did your child struggle the most? What did they enjoy the most? What was most helpful to them (& to you)? What was not at all helpful? Write down your answers.

**Prepare your child** - Help your child understand the IEP process as it is appropriate for their age and development. You can interview your child with questions similar to those you asked yourself about their school, educational and social hopes and needs. Then, at the meeting,

repeat this interview for the whole team to hear from your child, in their own words.

If your child will be attending any portion of the IEP meeting prepare them by explaining what to expect at the meeting. Your student may want to listen, speak off the cuff, prepare a statement to read or even create a short video to share. After your student has shared at the top of the meeting, many will wish to be excused to return to class. You can start involving your child as soon as they are ready and open to being involved even kindergarten is not too early! Plus, kids get a kick out of “signing their name” on the meeting attendance page like the adults around them.

**Prepare to record your meeting.** You can use a voice recorder on your phone. As a courtesy, notify the team that you are recording the meeting (technically, you don't have to per Virginia law). If the school team is aware that you are recording the meeting, they will also make a school recording.

### **During the meeting**

**Record your meetings!** Repeat back what has been said to be sure to capture concerns, changes or new information, such as “I just want to be sure that I understood you correctly when you said...”

If you are told “we don't do that” - ask why & remind school staff that **the child's needs, not the preferences of the school, drive the IEP**. Ask that blanket statements such as this be put in writing and ask to see the state or district policy outlining that rule. This includes blanket statements without discussion that could qualify as “pre-determination” such as: “Our special education program is 2 hours long,” or “Your child must get their required service hours through enrollment in Strategies for Success or Personal Development class; we will not provide their service hours in other classes or electives.”

**Document parent communication expectations in the IEP**, if you believe they are directly related to your child's needs.

**Request parent training as part of your child's IEP**, if you need it. School districts are required to provide parent training if needed to ensure that students have access to FAPE. Be specific about which skills you need to learn in order to support your child's learning needs. Some examples might be: training on school-provided AAC devices, training on how to use voice to text accommodations on the computer so that you may assist your child from home, the basics of behavior programs, etc.

**Request hard copies of textbooks.** If your child requires it as an accommodation, FCPS must provide a hard copy of any textbook whether it be a “traditional” hard-copy textbook or an

online textbook. If the textbook is not available as a bound hard copy, FCPS must provide an equivalent book or a PDF print out of the virtual book to be put into a 3-ring binder. Do not accept no for an answer, if your child needs a hard copy of an online or actual textbook!

**Be creative when thinking about accommodations.** Accommodations can include: recording classes, copies of teacher notes, study guides, receiving key vocabulary terms prior to lessons, breaking down long-term assignments into “chunks” with separate due dates, teacher sign-off in homework planners, etc.

**Be sure that your concerns are included in the Present Level of Performance (PLOP) section of the IEP.** Someone from the school team will be taking notes directly into the PLOP page of the IEP during the meeting.

**Don't sign the IEP at the end of a meeting** -- always take it home to read & review at your own pace! Compare what was removed/changed from the previous IEP. Be sure that your comments and concerns are included in the document. If you don't sign a new IEP, the old one stays in place.

## **Post-meeting**

**If you find mistakes in any documents (IEP, evaluation, etc), request that corrections be made before you sign.** Point out mistakes politely, and presume positive intent -- we all make mistakes.

If applicable, **sign partial consent to the IEP.** If you agree with some parts of the IEP and not others, you may “partially sign” the IEP. To do this, you must specifically state which parts of the IEP you agree with and which parts you do not agree with when you sign the IEP. You may initial sections you agree with in the margins and note specifically where you do not agree on the IEP margins with initials for additional clarification with a signed clarifying statement at the end where the signature is requested.

**Don't forget to send back your signed IEP once you've reviewed it carefully** (if you desire feedback, you could share it with a trusted family member, friend or advocate to get feedback). The IEP is not valid until you sign & return it!

**Say “thank you” to team members for their support of your child.** A little empathy and gratitude go a long way.

## **Fall 2020 Tips**

**All IDEA timelines are still in effect during Covid-19.** Regardless of where school is taking place: via distance-learning, partial in-person, or full-in person in school buildings, all IDEA timelines are still in effect. These guidelines include those for: eligibility, IEP meetings, and re-evaluations. If you previously signed to waive the timeline for testing, due to Covid-19 closures, consider rescinding that waiver. FCPS is conducting eligibility meetings and evaluations at this time. <https://www.wrightslaw.com/nltr/20/nl.0428.htm>

**FCPS School Based Staff (SBS) MUST meet with parents for their child's IEP addendum if the parent requests a full team meeting to discuss the addendum.** Staff is required to include parents in IEP meetings and may not meet without the parents unless they can show documentation that they have made significant efforts to involve the parents and have not been able to persuade parents to attend. School staff must give parents sufficient notice of meetings and schedule the meetings for times and locations mutually agreed upon with parents. It is not legal for the school to insist that you meet with them at one specific date/time/location and not allow the parents/guardians to give input into this decision. Communication must be provided in the preferred language of the parents.

**Document any regression of skills or academic progress** that have occurred since schools physically closed. Share this documentation with the school team and request that your observations be included on the PLOP page of the IEP.

**Sign the *revised (8.27.20) Informed Consent for Multimedia Related Services form*** or, at minimum, cross out & initial #5 on the form, if you have the older version of the form. FCPS is deleting #5 on the original form and is re-issuing the updated form to all families of students receiving related services.

**Do not waive your rights to services because they “cannot” be provided virtually** -- be creative & work with staff to figure out how to get it done! If you reach an impasse, reach out to the PSL and the greater special education community for help and input.

**Reach out to ATS or OT/PT providers NOW to get all of the equipment your child needs.** This may include items such as, but not limited to, augmentative communication devices, adaptive technology peripherals, slant boards, pencil grips, flexible seating, chewies, fidgets, specialized computer software (ie. Natural Reader, Co:Writer) etc.

<https://www.fcps.edu/academics/academic-overview/special-education-instruction/special-education-instruction-contact>

**If a student needs face-to-face services, the IEP team can recommend this** -- Virginia Department of Education regulations **do not exclude students from returning to school buildings.**

**Beware if the school team recommends significant reductions to service hours.** Your child's needs have not been magically and significantly reduced - if the IEP team agreed that your child needed a certain number of hours of special education support pre-covid, they likely still need the same amount of time now - or perhaps more!

**Reading intervention programs are available in the virtual environment.** If the intervention program says that your child needs to participate in the program five days a week for fidelity, your child should still be receiving access to the program five days a week.

**All FCPS laptops come with access to certain assistive technology programs via the FCPS Cloud such as: text-to-speech, speech-to-text and predictive readers.** SEPTA is waiting to hear from Central Office staff about which specific programs are available and how to gain access to them. In the meantime, you can reach out to your School-Based Technology Specialist (SBTS) and/or Assitive Technology Resource Teachers for assistance.

**Learn from an expert!** Watch this summer webinar where Hank Millward, from the Virginia Department of Education, answers parent questions about special education services during the COVID 19 pandemic. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOspaoJN8SQ>

Other resources:

<https://www.nclld.org/covid-19-parent-resources#1585848182172-cc874e7e-58f9>

[https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-NCLD-Parent-Advocacy-Toolkit\\_v2.pdf](https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-NCLD-Parent-Advocacy-Toolkit_v2.pdf)

**Consider accommodations available in the virtual learning environment.**

<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/for-educators/learning-and-thinking-differences-basics/iep-accommodations-during-distance-learning>

<https://www.additudemag.com/iep-504-plan-distance-learning/>

[http://www.ldonline.org/article/Accommodations\\_for\\_Students\\_with\\_LD](http://www.ldonline.org/article/Accommodations_for_Students_with_LD)

<https://adayinourshoes.com/iep-and-504-accommodations-for-zoom-online-classes/>

**Keep up with technology!** Our children's generation are "technology natives"; we, parents, are "technology immigrants".

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1\\_S9A45vTRArvGC7OUwfCzEwRgNRUypjLNIX9vO8\\_MOs/htmlview?fbclid=IwAR1IKgr4qtFI7y1VWqn-j5MDqzB6gf9wbTjRi7i838kLQeFJPkvxXHgnKU4](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1_S9A45vTRArvGC7OUwfCzEwRgNRUypjLNIX9vO8_MOs/htmlview?fbclid=IwAR1IKgr4qtFI7y1VWqn-j5MDqzB6gf9wbTjRi7i838kLQeFJPkvxXHgnKU4)