

IEP Improvements

Mid Year Special Education: A Great Time to Improve

By Steve McKee



Do you know where your child's IEP (Individualized Education Program) is? I don't mean what file drawer you stored the document in. Rather, do you know how your child's IEP is being implemented, and do you know how well it's actually working for your child's education?

Typically there is a huge flurry of activity at the beginning of the school year: updating IEPs, getting kids settled into new classes and routines, ensuring teachers and aides are in place and are trained. Typically, when school has been in progress for several weeks, things are relatively calm on the IEP front. Unless we hear from our kids or from the school that something is really wrong, we tend to assume that everything is right.

But no news is not always good news when it comes to your child's IEP, particularly for kids that have had behavior problems at school (which can often be the case with kids with fragile X). There is a tendency for schools to become satisfied if they have had success in managing problem behaviors. But eliminating problem behaviors doesn't provide a good education. It is just a good start.

Here are some things we parents can and should do during the school year to ensure our children are getting the most out of their special education experience.

Visit the Classroom (Again) In the last Foundation Quarterly, I discussed the importance of scheduling visits to your child's classroom, starting early in the school year. If you haven't spent time in your child's class since the beginning of the school year, it's time to go back. Among the things you want to look for:

- How has the school responded to concerns you shared from previous visits? Has there been improvement?
- Are there any new personnel (aides, therapists, etc.) working with your child? If so, have they been adequately trained?
- When is your child working on their IEP goals and objectives? Are there specific times during the school day? How much of the school day is it? Is the rest of the time being used to either generalize these skills or to work on the "general curriculum" that may not be part of the IEP? If not, why not?

If you have any concerns, discuss them with the classroom teacher and/or the IEP case manager. And make sure you follow up the discussion with a polite letter summarizing your concerns.

IEP Progress Reports

I am a big fan of IEP progress reports. Schools are required by law to report to parents on progress of IEP goals and objectives at least as frequently as progress is reported for all children. In practice, this usually means you'll get a progress report the same time that report cards are issued. And this needs to be spelled out in the IEP.

Alas, IEP progress reporting rarely works as well as it should. The good news is that a little effort from parents can usually go a long ways towards improving outcomes. The following table summarizes some of the common problems and what parents can do about them:

Common Problems with IEP Progress Reports	Solutions for Parents
1. Progress reports not provided or not provided on a timely basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Send an informal note to teacher or case manager reminding them that you are expecting the IEP progress report• Follow up immediately with letters and / or phone calls if reports are not provided when due
2. Progress reports lack supporting detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modify the IEP so that the progress reporting section specifically states what information will be included
3. Progress reports are ignored	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schedule a meeting to review the results within a week after reports are delivered• Never have an annual review meeting to update goals and objectives without first having the progress report from current goals and objectives

IEP Revisions

Schools and parents are often overwhelmed with updating each child's IEP just once a year (as required by law). But sometimes once a year is just not adequate. As parents, we should take an active role in ensuring that the IEP team revisits the IEP if it makes sense to update it during the school year. Here are some of the reasons we might want to do this:

- No or Minimal Progress with Goals – Perhaps the services spelled out in the IEP aren't being provided, or the services aren't sufficient, or the goals are inappropriate. For your kid's sake, don't wait a year to fix what's wrong.
- Great Progress With Goals – If a goal has been met, celebrate! And replace it with a new one now so your child is continually challenged to the best of their ability.

Continued, page 29

IEP Improvements *continued from page 20*

- New school – When your child starts a new school, it usually means a whole new team of people with new ideas. They may not have a lot of input on the ‘old’ IEP at the start of the school year, because they don’t know your child. But as soon as they get to know your child, they should be able to provide lots of fresh ideas and insights that parents should consider.

Final Thoughts

It’s really an ideal time to make improvements with your child’s special education. We’re past

the start up phase of school when teachers and administrators are very pressed for time. But it’s still early enough in the school year that there is plenty of time left to implement changes and modifications and benefit from them for the majority of the year.

While the IEP is a critical document, remember that your child’s education does not take place at IEP meetings at the beginning or end of the school year! Make sure the system is working for your child in between those meetings.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Steve is the Vice President of the Board of Director’s of the National Fragile X Foundation and the father of a son with fragile X and autism. He’s also President and Founder of Fape Solutions, a company that helps parents, advocates and educators develop and implement better IEP’s.