

Are you ready for your annual IEP meeting?

It's that time of year again. Every spring, schools dust off your child's cumulative folder and gear up to conduct their annual review of your child's individualized education plan (IEP). Are you ready?

Districts are required to review a student's IEP annually. While the plan can and should be reviewed more often, the law only requires that districts review the plan once year and invite the parents to this meeting. For most families this is the only time they get to speak to the IEP team. For some families, it is the only time they are hearing from the teachers and service providers regarding how their child is doing in school.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that a student with a disability that is also in need of specialized instruction receives a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). What is appropriate and how a student is to receive an appropriate education is identified through a student's individualized education plan (IEP). The right to have an IEP is arguably the most important right under the IDEA. I caution parents not to give up this right so easily.

What should you know and how should you prepare? First, schools often schedule back to back meetings leaving little time to speak about the student in any meaningful way. Second, the schools often do not invite the necessary and required members to the annual meeting. Third, schools often treat these meetings as routine and procedural rather than substantive. The perfunctory treatment of annual IEP meetings by school districts defeats the entire purpose for having the requirement to meet annually rendering that portion of the law meaningless. Unless parents assert their right to have a substantial IEP meeting at least annually, the schools will not provide one.