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## Your IEP Team Line-Up: An Essential Feature to a Quality IEP

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Is the process of scheduling and attending your child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting overwhelming? Are you often confused by that process and the vocabulary? Is, frankly, the best part of the IEP process when the meeting is over and you get to leave? Well, you are not alone! While building a strong IEP for your child helps set the stage for the year's focus and outlines the services and accommodations that will support your child to meet his/her goals, it is very 'process-heavy,' often leaving even the most experienced and prepared parent a bit overwhelmed. Don't fret: gathering necessary team members to contribute to the IEP development will help decrease some of the frustration you may experience and ultimately result in the most effective IEP for your child.

When a date is scheduled for your IEP meeting, you have the right to ask, in advance, who will be in attendance. You should expect that essential personnel will already be planning to be present. While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) outlines specific parties who should be in attendance [HERE](#), you will find that adherence to this list will vary from year to year and from school to school due to reality, practicality, limited resources, and scheduling issues. That said, you should know who you have a right to access for your child's IEP meeting in case you feel as though you are not getting the support you need.

So, beyond IDEA requirements, who do you really need at the meeting? Here's a list of people you might find most important to the completion of a thorough IEP. While not exhaustive, this list suggests who the essential members of the IEP team are and what their role is in developing an IEP that works best for your child.

- **YOU:** Don't forget yourself as an essential person on your child's team. You are not merely an invited guest; you are the most important person at the table!
- **Special Educator:** This should be someone who can speak to the skilled support your child requires in both a small classroom setting, during isolated instruction, and when fully integrated in school settings. This person may also be considered

your child's school case manager, responsible for writing and ensuring implementation of the IEP document.

- **Specialist(s):** Counselors, speech therapists, mental health professionals, occupational therapists, psychologists, assistive technology teams, and others fall into this category. If you have recently completed evaluations and will be considering those or other tests in the IEP meeting, you will want to make sure the individual who tested OR a person that can speak to the evaluation is present. Even if your child has not recently undergone testing, if s/he receives specialists' services and has goals related to that specialty, those specialists should be in attendance to support the IEP team.
- **General Education Teacher:** If your child regularly interacts with his/her typical peers in an academic classroom or "special" (gym, art, theater), this person is essential. The goal for the IEP team should be to make the school as inclusive as possible for your child, so getting this educator's perspective helps in goal setting for your child. Perhaps the general ed teacher has some good ideas on how to get your child more included. Or maybe s/he needs to hear about all of the other services your child receives. Either way, the IEP development process will be better with the general ed teacher included.
- **District Representative:** This person is especially important if your team will be discussing a change in schools, a major issues with your child's current setting, or anything else that will require the school and, thus, the district to be creative or to access additional resources (think: money).
- **Your child:** Have you considered having your child attend? While this is most often common practice in your child's later years as you prepare for post-secondary transitions, your child may benefit from attending even a portion of the meeting. Include your child if you think it will help his/her IEP development.

If any of the essential team members are unable to attend, they will ask for you to sign an excusal form. Do what you feel is best in this situation. If you feel the person is essential to the IEP completion and it would not make sense to hold the meeting without that person, exercise your right to ask the team to reschedule for a time that all are able attend. If rescheduling isn't necessary but you still want the absent member's input, consider creative ways to get his/her feedback, such as sitting down prior to the IEP so that you can review what that person would have offered in the meeting, including what intended goals s/he has for your child for the upcoming year. You may also schedule a time to talk over the phone with this person to accomplish the same goal. Getting a good team together is a skill in itself and may regularly take the creativity of many!



As you move forward this year, remember: you will not be the first parent to sit in an IEP meeting and wonder where specific teachers are, be overwhelmed by the number of people at the table, or maybe both. If you need support or someone to bounce ideas off of, reach out to your advocate at The Arc of Aurora, 720-213-1420. But most importantly, don't fear the IEP and its processes. The IEP process can be easily summarized as a necessary, though sometimes tedious, process to ensure your child gets what s/he needs across the school setting.