



# PREPARING FOR THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR

## Tips & Tools!

If you still have questions, or just want to talk to someone about the IEP process, or how to make your child's school year successful, contact your local Parent Training and Information Center.

BY DIANA AUTIN

As a parent of a child with special needs, you are committed to ensuring that your child receives the services and supports needed to have a successful school year. Your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the path to that success. This article provides you with tips and tools that you can use to ensure an effective IEP that will make all the difference to your child in the year to come.

### POSITIVE STUDENT PROFILE

You can complete a Positive Student Profile Form in preparation for your IEP meeting and at the beginning of the new school year. It will help you share information about your child's strengths, challenges and successes with the IEP team and your child's teacher. The template at [www.spanadvocacy.org/sites/g/files/g524681/f/files/START\\_Positive\\_Student\\_Profile\\_.pdf](http://www.spanadvocacy.org/sites/g/files/g524681/f/files/START_Positive_Student_Profile_.pdf) can be adapted to fit your individual family needs. Headings and categories may be changed to include the information that you feel is most important to share with the people working and interacting with your child. The idea is to help them to see the strengths and positive attributes of your child. If your child is old enough, you can also help them to complete the Positive Self-Profile. This process helps them identify their own strengths and needs and begins the process of self-advocacy.

### PREPARING FOR THE IEP MEETING

Another great tool to use to prepare for your child's IEP meeting can be found at <http://www.spannj.org/START/tools1.htm>. Here you can find a collection of tools for parents, students, and educators – all critical members of the IEP team. These IEP preparation tools provide the team with a common focus for IEP development and implementation, as well as a vehicle for sharing individual perspectives. The student tools can be used to prepare youth for participating in the IEP meeting and building self-advocacy skills. These tools include Questions for the Collaborative Team; Parent Preparation for the IEP Meeting; Student Preparation for the IEP Meeting; and Teacher Preparation for the IEP Meeting.

**POSITIVE STUDENT PROFILE**

CHILD'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

My child's strengths, abilities and interests (academic and social):

Insert Picture Here

What my child has learned this year (in school and outside of school):

My child's interests and activities outside of school:

**FIRST IMPRESSION:** A Positive Student Profile is a great way to introduce your child to teachers at the beginning of the school year.

You can also review the document, Selection of Supports in General Education Classrooms: Guiding Questions, to prepare for the placement component of the IEP meeting. This document provides parent and educators with ideas about curricular/instructional modifications or specialized instructional strategies, materials, equipment and technology that may be needed to support your child's success in the general education classroom. You can find this tool at <http://www.spannj.org/START/tools1.htm>

### LITERACY ISSUES

Literacy is important for all children, including children with disabilities. The Literacy Pages for Families guide, found at [www.spanadvocacy.org/sites/g/files/g524681/f/files/START\\_Literacy%20Pages.pdf](http://www.spanadvocacy.org/sites/g/files/g524681/f/files/START_Literacy%20Pages.pdf), gives you concrete activities that you can use at home to support the development of your child's literacy skills. For each activity, the guide includes the skill focus, the materials you will need, step by step directions to follow with your child, and suggestions that address your child's specific interests and strengths.

## ADDRESSING BEHAVIOR CHALLENGES

If your child has challenging behavior in school, it is important to ensure completion of a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and development of a Positive Behavior Support (PBS) plan as part of the IEP. You can find out more about FBAs and PBS plans at [www.spanadvocacy.org/content/functional-behavior-assessment-positive-behavior-supports-guide](http://www.spanadvocacy.org/content/functional-behavior-assessment-positive-behavior-supports-guide).

## TRANSITION TO ADULT LIFE

IDEA requires that students with disabilities be involved in their own IEP development and have a transition to adulthood plan in their IEP starting no later than age 16, and earlier if appropriate. (Note: Your state may require transition planning to start at age 14). You can find useful information about transition-related goals and services at [www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/transition-goals/](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/transition-goals/). To engage your youth in their own transition planning, check out the National Dissemination Center's guide, *Relish is for More than Hot Dogs: A Student's Guide to Making Your Own Sweet Success*, found at <http://nichcy.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/st3.pdf>. Another good resource on transition are Centers for Independent Living which help students with disabilities with activities of daily living, independent living skills, and maximizing independence and can be found at: <http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html>

## THE IEP MEETING

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal law that governs special education, provides a specific process that should be used at the IEP meeting, starting with an identification of your child's strengths and needs, and your priorities for your child's development, and then moving to identification of goals and objectives tied to the general curriculum, the specific services and supports that will be provided to your child, how your child's progress will be assessed, and how you will be informed of this progress. The IEP also includes the "placement," the type of setting in which the IEP will be implemented. IDEA requires that, to the maximum extent appropriate, your child be educated in the general education classroom with needed supports, services, accommodations, and modifications, and with non-disabled peers. The IEP Meeting Checklist for Parents can be used to ensure that you discuss all of the areas that should be part of the IEP conversation. You can find the Checklist at [www.spanadvocacy.org/sites/g/files/g524681/f/files/IEP%20MEETING%20CHECKLIST%20FOR%20PARENTS.pdf](http://www.spanadvocacy.org/sites/g/files/g524681/f/files/IEP%20MEETING%20CHECKLIST%20FOR%20PARENTS.pdf).

## WHAT IF WE DISAGREE?

In every important relationship, there will be disagreements! You care deeply about your child's future. You bring that passion to the IEP meeting and to your relationships with the teachers and other professionals who work with your child. The US Department of Education has funded a technical assistance center, the National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE). They have an array of resources and tools, written and on video, in

English and Spanish, at [www.directionservice.org/cadre/](http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/), on how to strengthen parent-professional partnerships. They also have a series of parent guides on each of the formal dispute resolution processes under IDEA, from mediation to complaint investigation to due process hearings. You can access these excellent guides at [www.directionservice.org/cadre/DRparentguides2014.cfm](http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/DRparentguides2014.cfm).

## OTHER TIPS, TOOLS, AND RESOURCES

You can find many other tips, tools and resources about preparing for your IEP meeting, and the new school year, on the website of the new Center for Parent Information and Resources. Check out all their resources in English and Spanish at [www.parentcenterhub.org/resources/](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/resources/).

If you still have questions, or just want to talk to someone about the IEP process, or how to make your child's school year successful, contact your local Parent Training and Information Center. Parent Centers are funded by the US Department of Education under IDEA to provide you with information about your rights and the rights of your child in the special education process, how the process works, evidence-based practices that will maximize your child's learning, and strategies to partner with professionals in decision-making. Parent Centers are staffed by parents just like you who have children with special needs and who have been trained to help you be the best advocate for

your child! Find the Parent Center near you at [www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center) •

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Diana Autin is the Executive Co-Director of the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN), NJ's Parent Training and Information Center; Family-to-Family Health Information Resource Center; Family Voices and Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health chapters; Statewide Parent to Parent program; and Military Family 360 Support Project among other programs. Autin codirects NE-PACT, the Region 1 Parent Technical Assistance Center, providing technical assistance and capacity-building to the federally-funded parent training and information centers and community parent resource centers in the Northeast United States.

### Tools for School



NCIL advances independent living and the rights of people with disabilities through consumer-driven advocacy. NCIL envisions a world in which people with disabilities are valued equally and participate fully.

[www.ncil.org](http://www.ncil.org)



Encouraging the use of mediation and other collaborative strategies to resolve disagreements about special education and early intervention programs.

[www.directionservice.org/cadre/](http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/)



Center for Parent Information and Resources

A central resource of information and products to the community of Parent Training Information (PTI) Centers and the Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs), so that they can focus their efforts on serving families of children with disabilities.

[www.parentcenterhub.org](http://www.parentcenterhub.org)