Tips for Engaging Your Child in the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Student involvement in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process is important to their success, but research shows that only about 10 percent take an active role. While many attend their meetings, most offer little input because the process can feel overwhelming. Since the IEP is their plan for success in school and into adulthood, they must be involved. Students' engagement will vary based on age, development, needs, and strengths.

Here are a few tips for parents to help their child get involved in the IEP process:

Understand the Special Education Process:

- The IEP process can often be overwhelming and confusing. The more you understand, the better you can advocate for your child and assist them in taking a more active role.
- If you have questions about the IEP process, contact the special education teacher at your child's school. You can also contact Pathfinder Services of North Dakota. PSND can help you gain knowledge about the IEP process, your rights, and answer any questions you may have.

Start Early:

- The earlier a child can be engaged in their IEP, the better. Parents know best when it is the right time to involve their child. A younger child may be able to take on small tasks to be part of the IEP process. They can introduce team members and explain how each person is connected to them (ex., mom, teacher, principal). They might also share some of their strengths and challenges in school. As the child gets older and/or more confident, they can take on more responsibilities.

Working with the School:

- Connect with your child's special education teacher to understand if they do any prep work with your child on their IEP. If not, discuss with the teacher that you would like your child to be engaged in the process.

If Your Child is Nervous or Unsure of Participating:

- Work with your child before the meeting to help them identify their strengths and challenges in school. Even if they do not attend at first, you can still share their thoughts with the team.
- After the IEP meeting, review what was discussed with your child and ask for their input.
- Keep involving them in preparing for future meetings and following up afterward, until they feel ready to attend and take on a small role.

Additional Tips:

- Explain the IEP in terms that are developmentally appropriate for your child.
- Reinforce to your child that the IEP is their plan, and their thoughts and involvement are important.
- Ask your child if there is someone at the school whom they want at their IEP meeting and who they feel comfortable talking to.
- Create a chart at home that shows the goals and objectives of the IEP so you and your child can check in regularly about their progress. Identify what is working and what struggles your child may be experiencing.
- Work with your child so that they understand the accommodations that are in place within their IEP.
- Have your child help prepare the agenda for the IEP meeting.
- Celebrate! Celebrate with your child when they meet an objective or achieve a goal!
- Prior to the meeting, walk through the goals and objectives of their IEP.
- Together, you and your child can create a list of questions and/or concerns about the IEP, which you can then take to the meeting.
- Have your child explain their disability and how it impacts them.
- Encourage your child to give input on how their accommodations are working.
- Have your child share their work with the IEP team. As they get older, they could also create a portfolio.
- Have older children assist in identifying goals and objectives.
- Have your child share their future goals. This can be done every year and at every age.

When involving your child, make sure that they are comfortable in how they are engaging in the IEP process. Every student has different strengths, needs and comfort levels, so adjusting their role to match their preference is important.

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