

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

Editor's Note: Content presented in the Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog is for awareness and informational purposes only, and it is not meant to be a diagnostic tool.

Will your child's last IEP be appropriate for the 2020-2021 school year? Has your child's school district decided how the students will start school the year? These are important questions that must be answered.

Up until last year, your child's IEP was written so that services were delivered in the classroom by a teacher and/or an instructional assistant. With a new school year about to begin, you will want your child's IEP to match the service delivery model offered by the school. School districts have various options available to them. The options for service delivery by school districts may include (1) total in-person instruction only, (2) a hybrid model of in-person instruction along with distance/virtual learning, or (3) total distance/virtual learning.

Whatever option your school district provides, make sure that your child's IEP matches the school service delivery option. As the COVID-19 numbers are rising, some type of distance/virtual learning is beginning to look like the preferred method of instruction at the beginning of the school year. Distance/Virtual learning isn't easy for some students, but it is particularly difficult for those with learning differences that require individualized education programs (IEPs). Moreover, Naomi Brickel, director of the Community Support Network and coordinator of policy at the Westchester Institute for Human Development in Valhalla, New York provides additional support about the difficulty of distance/virtual learning. She says, "Not every kid is comfortable in a virtual platform. **Appropriate support systems must be in place for you and your child.**"

If your school district's only option offered is in-person and in-classroom instruction, no modification in your child's IEP is needed. However, if your child receives any type of distance/virtual learning service delivery model, it is time to revisit and possibly revise the IEP that is currently in place.

Most parents already have a good feel for creating and developing an IEP for their child for an in-person and in-classroom experience. However, the stress of developing an IEP for a different learning venue may impact one's memory. So, I just want to take the opportunity to go over and reinforce some points that will help make the IEP process run smoother.

Here is a list of core elements that will help to create a productive and beneficial IEP meeting:

Before the Meeting:

Pre-Meeting Communication Matters.

Request that the IEP or Evaluation Review Team meet to develop a distance/virtual learning IEP that best meets your child's needs. Remember that distance/virtual learning does not support all students with disabilities. A one-size IEP does not work for every student. Your child may be

the one that does not benefit from this type of learning. Distance/Virtual learning may not be aligned with the concept of a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). As the parent, you must determine if the way that distance/virtual learning designed by the school is **“Appropriate”** for your child. As a suggestion, if you want a good IEP for your child, you need to share your concerns and information about your child prior to the meeting. This will help the IEP team digest this information and do its job. Many parents find that when they provide information about their child and their ideas about their child’s educational program in writing several days before the meeting, the child receives a better IEP.

In preparing for the IEP meeting, review the following points:

- Email confirmation of the type of meeting (in person or virtual), time and place of the meeting. Print out this email for your records.
- Along with a request for a meeting to revise your child’s IEP, be sure to communicate to the administrator which school personnel you think needs to attend the meeting — teachers, administrators, staff, and related service team members. During the meeting, if any member of the team needs to leave the meeting before the meeting is completed, you must grant that person permission to leave. If an integral member of the team needs to leave, you can always ask that the meeting be rescheduled when this person can attend in its entirety.
- Be clear about the goals of the meeting.
- Feel free to suggest the date and time of the meeting that best meets your schedule. If you are unable to attend the meeting in person, let the administrator know that you are open to having a virtual IEP meeting.
- Organize your files prior to the meeting. Gather and organize all materials, correspondence (school to home and home to school) and documents that you need for the meeting.

Data Gathering Is Key!

The more data that you have about the issues that your child experienced with distance/virtual learning last year, the better. Explain the issues that your child had last year with distance/virtual learning. You will probably want to look at their grades, observational notes that you made last year noting any frustration that your child expressed, progress monitoring data that the teacher may have given you regarding the level of achievement of your child’s goals and objectives, and any data that’s available from Extended School Year services from the summer.

During the Meeting:

During the meeting, make a note of all the team members assembled for the meeting. If the meeting is done via conference call or video conference (which may likely be the case for some time), this step is even more important. You want to be sure that you can connect with everybody at the beginning of the meeting. It is of the utmost importance to communicate clearly and ensure that you and the IEP team members are on the same page regarding your child’s goals and progress. **Discuss the supports and next steps that are needed for continued progress of your child and their new annual goals.** Ask questions and get feedback from IEP team members regarding your child’s previous work, achievements, and needs.

Keep in mind that distance/virtual learning calls for more support for your child. In a distance/virtual learning platform know and understand how your child will receive their related services such as speech therapy, counseling, reading support, specialized math instruction, life skills classes, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social skills meetings, medical services, and social interaction with their regular education peers.

In all instances, it is about your child receiving a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). The responsibility rests with the school to ensure FAPE. For example, if the teacher emails handouts to your child, you will possibly want to ask the school for a laptop, a printer, copy paper, and ink for the printer. Anything that your child needs to ensure FAPE, be sure to request it. Another resource that may be necessary for your child is Assistive Technology. If your child uses assistive technology at school, it should be provided for home as well.

After a month of distance/virtual learning, you discover that more support is needed for your child. You can call for another IEP meeting to ensure that your child's needs are met.

Be sure to include a provision in the IEP for weekly check-ins by the teachers. This helps to keep everybody on track and focused on your child's progress. Information obtained from these weekly check-ins could result in revisions to the current IEP. There may be pushback by the school regarding weekly check-in by the teacher. If you think weekly check-ins support FAPE for your child, go for it, but always base your request in the context of FAPE.

Make sure all services, goals, and frequency of services are indicated and written correctly in the conference summary. Be sure that what you ask for is noted in the conference summary. Make sure that it is noted what actions will be taken, who is responsible for carrying out the action, and when the action will be completed. Accountability helps keep everybody on track and your child's education moving forward. After all, that is why we do what we do, isn't it...to make sure your child gets the chance they deserve to thrive and succeed in school and in their day-to-day life!

There are two parts of the IEP that are of extreme value to you as the parent. These sections of the IEP are **Related Services and Supports for School Personnel**. For the distance/virtual learning part of the IEP, you, the parent, can be considered school personnel. During the IEP meeting, ask about how you will receive help, suggestions, and resources for implementing your child's IEP at home. Ask the team to share their insights into how your child learns best and the learning strategies that work best for your child. Find out from the IEP team about how best to arrange the learning environment at home for your child. Before leaving the meeting, identify who will be providing this service, when can you expect the help, suggestions, and resources to begin. If the agreed upon timeline for this help is not followed, or you need more assistance, **be sure to note your concern in an email to the teacher, intervention specialist, and the administrator who attended the IEP meeting.**

After the Meeting

The importance of following up on the actions identified in the meeting is very important. Accountability is the factor that will keep everyone on point and ensure that the IEP is implemented as written. **When you have a concern about your child or the implementation**

of their IEP, document your concern in an email to the intervention specialist and the administrator that was a member of the IEP team. Then, print off the email and put it in your documentation file. Also, print off the reply you receive and put it into your documentation file.

Remember the Importance of a Detailed PWN.

Finally, it is necessary to write a detailed PWN (Prior Written Notice) that outlines what took place during the IEP meeting and what the school's actions will be for the annual IEP year. This helps keep everyone accountable, which means the meeting will produce measurable and positive results. A written notice must be provided to the parent when a request by you is denied. In this written notice, reasons must be given as to why the school is unable to grant your request. Always remember, the context for any request should be related to FAPE, which is to say that what you are requesting is free and appropriate for your child needs.

If you need help with your child's IEP meeting, please be sure to contact me. I am always happy to be of assistance.

Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

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