

TERRI'S TIPS

Parent Mentors share ideas and resources with one another on a daily basis. [Terri Goodridge](#), mom of a young son receiving special education related services and a Bibb County Parent Mentor, files our parents' tips in categories, so she can share information.



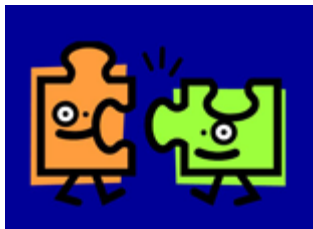
Terri Zeros in on IEPs

Before the end of the academic year, the Spring IEP meetings must take place.

I could easily go on and on.....and on about how to help our families have successful IEP meetings. There is literally loads of information out there!

I have selected some of the most helpful and useful pieces of information that I and other Mentors have used. My hope is that these tips, tools and resources can be utilized to improve the lives of the children and families who must travel along this IEP journey.

Powerpoint Presentations



[IEP 101 with Scott Crain and Kathy Kelly](#)
[IEP Presentation - Spanish](#)

Preparation Sheets

[Parent Preparation Sheet for IEP Meetings or School Conferences](#)



[About My Child](#)

From the workbook "A Full Life Ahead" by Judy Barclay & Jan Cobb, 2001

Your IEP is like game

software and the way you learn is like a game system. My kids FINALLY got a Play Station 3 for Christmas. They told my mother about it, and she wanted to get them a game.

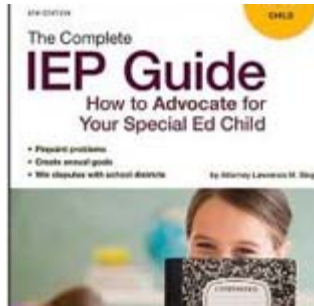
Unaware of the differences in gaming systems, my mother bought one for Xbox. Same game... but it wasn't going to work in the PS3. Your IEP is like game software and the way you learn is like a game system. You might be a PS3, your friend is an Xbox, and your other friend is a Wii. You all GET to learn Math, but you all need your own software to learn it. You need the software that goes with your system.

Also, you may have the same software and hardware as someone else, but you need your own controller. That is why you have accommodations and modifications that are just for you.

When you participate in your IEP, you GET to design your software for the next school year. You GET to say what works and what doesn't. You GET to teach the adults about you and how you learn. From here on, you GET to have a say in your education. Not all of your friends can do that. You are a software designer every year when you participate in your annual IEP meeting.

Allison Stevenson, Fayette County

Further Reading



[The Complete IEP Guide: How to Advocate for Your Special Ed Child](#)

Lawrence M. Siegel (2009)

IEP Tips for Family Attendance and Engagement

Federal law dictates that the parents of a child with a disability should be engaged in the team process at the annual Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting. Yet, Georgia's 2008 statewide data on parent/family annual IEP attendance showed that almost half the IEPs were written without family participation! Several school districts reported some discrepancies in their IEP attendance data but even taking this into consideration, there are thousands of families not attending the IEP meeting.

What can Parent Mentors do to increase the attendance numbers and more importantly improve family engagement at the IEP meeting?

Partner with [Parent to Parent of GA](#), our Parent Training Information Center, (PTI) to offer free trainings on a variety of IEP related issues.



Send home an IEP worksheet prior to the meeting so the student and his/her family can discuss their hopes, dreams and even nightmares before addressing goals at the meeting. Discuss with your special education director the suggestion that parents ask their teachers to send home students' current performance levels before the IEP meeting for review in advance. It is helpful if possible for the teacher and parent to discuss possible goals before the meeting.

Ask the parent/family member to help his/her student prepare an introductory statement to share at the IEP meeting. Send home samples.

Talk to your Special Education Director about encouraging student-led IEPs. The Governor's Council for Developmental Disabilities can assist with information for teachers to prepare students for self-led IEPs. This could be a helpful tool in encouraging family members to attend. Children who are nonverbal can be assisted in preparing a slide show.

Encourage teachers to avoid using the word 'No.' It is a showstopper at IEP meetings. Sometimes a parent is not asking the question that gets to the core of the family concern. Teachers can probe for more detail to discover what the parent wants for his or her child. A discussion about pros and cons is so much more valuable for collaboration instead of a "no." Remember not using the word "no" does not mean the teacher is saying 'yes.'

Every parent who does not respond to an IEP notice should be called. Letters and emails will not bring many parents to the IEP table – especially those who feel isolated from the process.

Prepare a resource sheet for teachers to give to parents at IEPs. It should include contacts for Parent Mentor, Parent to Parent and other resources in the area. It should be colorful and on hard stock so parent will hold on to it. Printing the school calendar on the other side of the resource sheet is another way to get families to keep the resource sheet throughout the school year. If you can, laminate it so it stands an even better chance of making it to the refrigerator door.

Provide information beforehand so parents will be better informed during IEP meetings (i.e.: glossary of educational abbreviations, acronyms)

Offer transportation or childcare to facilitate parents' attendance.

Offer alternatives to meeting places: home, phone conferences, local churches etc.

Suggest families bring a friend to the IEP. Some systems are working on Parent to Parent's new program "IEP Buddy." Call Parent to Parent of Georgia 800-229-2038 for assistance. Some of the parent mentors are piloting the IEP Buddy program this year. Ask questions on the listserve!

Offer to practice questions with parents over the phone.

Motivate parents to get started with transition planning before the IEP meeting so parents will be prepared to offer input (or to assist their child in offering input) on transition planning.

Identify parents/families who historically do not attend IEP meetings and reach out to them. The problem may be transportation or child care.

Team up with Title I coordinators, teachers, social workers, resource officers, principals and assistant principals to try to discover ways to encourage parents' participation and attendance at IEP meetings.

Talk to parent mentors in your region, identify best practices that you can adopt for your system and check out the Parent Mentor Learning Curve.

Write a catchy slogan/ colorful flyer that explains to families how important it is to attend the IEP.

Assist Families to prepare and plan for the meeting by showing them how to look at the current IEP and to think about what is working well and what is not. Help them make a list of questions to ask at the IEP meeting and points they may want to make.

[April Lee](#)

Wayne County Schools

Tracking and Reporting IEP Numbers



Pam Moore shares her personal experiences of IEP tracking and reporting numbers. This is often a very important factor in our jobs as Parent Mentors to help in the data collected.

Last year, I used IEP attendance numbers as part of a contest for families and teachers, so I called our system FTE coordinator and asked for "IEP attendance numbers."

Here's what I Learned:

It's important to ask for specific information (EG: What are the exact start/stop dates for report? Do you want annual reviews only or should reports include initial meetings? How do you want the information broken down: By school? Teacher? Disability? Grade level? Find out what data your district collects and select accordingly.)

Learn about timelines and teacher reporting requirements in your district. Make report requests early and be prepared to wait. Find out how teachers are reporting parent attendance and who actually inputs that data. (My director makes SURE teachers know how important it is to check the box indicating parent attendance.)

Get a complete system report rather than lots of individual reports. You may also want the information broken down, but unless you are handy with juggling data (and I'm NOT!) you will spend a lot of time checking yourself for accuracy if you have to collate school reports

[Pam Moore](#)

Madison County Schools