



What's the Big IDEA? # 12

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities. This series is designed to offer information about IDEA as amended in 2004. Each fact sheet will focus on a different aspect of IDEA.

Special Factors – Part 2

This is our second fact sheet on the special factors that an IEP team must consider for each child during every IEP. Part 1 covered the Behavior and Limited English Proficiency factors. This sheet will address the needs of students who are blind or visually impaired; have a hearing impairment; or need assistive technology.

IDEA Section 300.324(a)(2) states that the IEP Team must –

1. In the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, provide for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille unless the IEP Team determines, after an evaluation of the child's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the child's future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille), that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child;

First of all, the team will want to make sure the student has received a functional vision evaluation. This evaluation will give the team information about how a student with a visual impairment can use his/her remaining vision or other senses in educational settings. The team must consider the best way for the student to access the curriculum. Braille must be considered first. Then, if Braille is not appropriate for the student, the team can consider formats such as Large Print, regular print with an optical device, recorded books, or other accessible instructional materials. IDEA 2004 requires schools to provide accessible versions of instructional materials to *all* students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that struggle to read using traditional print. This includes students who are not identified as blind or visually impaired. For more information on accessible instructional materials, see fact sheet #23.



The team will also determine if other assessments are needed. For example, does the student need services from an orientation and mobility specialist in order to get around the school campus? Does he or she need instruction in daily living (adaptive) skills? Is there a need for an assistive technology evaluation?

2. Consider the communication needs of the child, and in the case of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing, consider the child's language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communications with peers and professional personnel in the child's language and communication mode, academic level, and full range of needs, including opportunities for direct instruction in the child's language and communication mode;

The IEP team must consider the child's communication needs regardless of the child's disability. As the team considers the student's communication needs, they may ask the following questions:

1. What does the child need to communicate? What opportunities does he/she have to communicate?
2. Does the child have the skills and strategies he or she needs to be able to communicate?
3. Can the child communicate appropriately and effectively in different settings? If not, why not?

The team will also need to consider the child's receptive (listening) and expressive (speaking) abilities. What are his/her skills with spoken language, written language, and/or signed language? Does he or she use more than one method of communicating – for example signed and written language? Does he or she use alternative communication modes such as eye gaze or picture symbols. Are any communication devices needed?

“While any significant impairment in a child’s ability to understand and use language undoubtedly plays an enormous role in a child’s ability to learn and make progress in the general education curriculum, it does not, in and of itself, mean that a child cannot learn and make progress.” National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)

The team should make a plan for the student which addresses his/her needs through goals, special education services, related services, and supplementary aids and services. The plan should also describe opportunities for communication with peers and professionals in both academic and extracurricular (nonacademic) settings.



3. Consider whether the child needs assistive technology devices and services.

Regardless of the type or severity of disability, assistive technology (AT) should be considered at every IEP meeting. There are a wide variety of devices that are considered assistive technology – from pencil grips to sophisticated computer programs. AT services may include both the equipment and consultant services for assessment or training. Does the child need AT support or does the teacher need support to enable a child to be educated in the regular education classroom? If the team feels they don't know enough about AT, they can request an AT assessment. If your school district does not have the answers, the New Mexico Technology Assistance Program (www.nmtap.com) might be able to help. This program is designed to help New Mexicans gain access to assistive technology. You and your school may even be able to borrow equipment from this program. The following questions from the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) provide guidelines for what teams should be considering when discussing AT services.

1. What task do we want the student to perform that he or she is unable to do at a level reflecting his or her skills and/or abilities (writing, reading, communicating, etc.)?
2. Can the student complete tasks with the strategies or accommodations that are already in place?
3. Is there available AT that can be used? If so, what?
4. Is the use of the AT device and/or AT service necessary for the student to perform this skill more easily or efficiently in the least restrictive environment?

For more information on assistive technology, you may want to look at our fact sheet #13.

If you would like more information about special factors or help with your child's IEP, please call Parents Reaching Out at 505-247-0192 or 1-800-524-5176 and ask to speak with a PTI Family Liaison.

Sources:

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (www.nichcy.org): *Building the Legacy: A Training Curriculum on IDEA 2004.*

New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) – Special Education Bureau. *Developing Quality IEPs Technical Assistance Manual* <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/SEB/technical/DevelopingQualityIEPs.pdf>

“What’s the Big IDEA?” fact sheets are developed by Parents Reaching Out under a grant from the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education. Views expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the federal government.