

PARENT ADVOCACY SERIES

Your Rights Under IDEA: A Quick Reference

Seven key protections every parent should know when navigating the special education process.

Understanding your rights as a parent is one of the most powerful tools you have in advocating for your child. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal law that protects your child's right to education and ensures you have a voice in the process. **You are an essential partner in your child's education**, and this information is here to empower you.

1 The Right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

The cornerstone of special education law — it guarantees that your child with a disability is entitled to a public education specifically designed to meet their unique needs, at no cost to you.

WHAT IT MEANS

The school must provide specialized instruction and related services (like speech or OT) that allow your child to make meaningful progress on their goals.

Why it matters: FAPE ensures your child is not just sitting in a classroom, but actively learning and developing skills in a way that's appropriate for them.

2 The Right to an Evaluation

You have the right to request that the school conduct a comprehensive evaluation if you suspect your child has a disability that impacts their learning.

WHAT IT MEANS

The evaluation must be free, thorough, and non-discriminatory, assessing all areas of suspected disability. Your written consent is required before it begins.

Why it matters: This evaluation is the first step to determining eligibility and provides the data needed to create an effective IEP.

3 The Right to Participate in the IEP Process

You are an equal and essential member of your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team.

WHAT IT MEANS

The school must make reasonable efforts to ensure you can attend and participate in all IEP meetings. Your input must be considered in every decision.

Why it matters: No one knows your child better than you do — your participation ensures the IEP truly reflects your child's strengths and needs.

4 The Right to Be Informed and Give Consent

The school must provide "Prior Written Notice" whenever it proposes or refuses to change your child's evaluation, identification, or educational placement.

WHAT IT MEANS

The notice must explain what the school plans to do (or not do), why, and what other options were considered. Your written consent is required before services begin.

Why it matters: This keeps you fully informed and gives you the opportunity to respond before any changes are made.

5 The Right to the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Your child has the right to be educated with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate for their needs.

WHAT IT MEANS

Your child should not be removed from the general education classroom unless their disability is significant enough that they cannot learn successfully there, even with support.

Why it matters: LRE promotes inclusion and ensures your child has the same opportunities as their peers to be part of the school community.

6

The Right to Access Your Child's Educational Records

You have the right to review all of your child's educational records that the school maintains.

WHAT IT MEANS

You can request records, and the school must comply within a reasonable timeframe (no more than 45 days). You may also request corrections to incorrect information.

Why it matters: Reviewing records helps you stay informed about your child's progress and history — crucial for effective advocacy.

7

The Right to Dispute Decisions (Procedural Safeguards)

If you disagree with a decision the school has made about your child's education, you have options to resolve the dispute.

WHAT IT MEANS

IDEA provides several dispute resolution options, including mediation, filing a state complaint, or requesting a due process hearing. The school must provide this information at least once per year.

Why it matters: These safeguards ensure you have a formal process to follow if you believe your child's rights are not being met.

Trust your instincts and don't be afraid to ask questions. **This journey can feel challenging, but you are not alone.**