TRANSCENDERS - FAMILY NAVIGATOR

IEP Meeting Toolkit

Walk in prepared. Know what to ask, what to write down, and what to check before you sign, so the plan on paper matches the help your child gets in class.



Inside this toolkit

- Your rights at a glance
- A four week preparation timeline
- Worksheets you can fill in and bring
- Questions worth asking, grouped by topic
- What to do if you disagree
- Copy and send letter templates

Bring this whole packet. Print it, write in the margins, and take notes on page 7 during the meeting. A filled in toolkit is often the clearest record of what you asked for and what the team agreed.

For parents and guardians of students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). General information only, not legal advice. State timelines and forms vary, so check your state and district rules.

START HERE

Your rights at a glance

You are not a guest at the IEP meeting. Under IDEA, parents are members of the IEP team, and the school must include you in decisions about identification, evaluation, placement, and the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for your child.

Rights to know before you go

- **Notice.** The school must tell you, in writing and early enough for you to attend, when and where the meeting will be and who will be there.
- **Participation.** The meeting must be at a time and place you can attend, in person or by phone or video. Ask to reschedule if the time does not work.
- **Language access.** The school must take steps so you understand the meeting, including an interpreter if you need one.
- **Prior written notice.** When the school proposes or refuses a change to identification, evaluation, placement, or FAPE, it must give you written notice explaining why, what data it used, and what other options it considered.

More protections

- **Consent.** The school needs your written consent for the first evaluation and before it first provides special education services. Consent for one thing is not consent for everything.
- **Records.** You may inspect and review your child's education records and ask for corrections if something is inaccurate or misleading.
- **Reevaluation.** Your child must be reevaluated at least once every three years, unless you and the school agree in writing that it is not needed. You can also request an evaluation sooner.
- **Independent evaluation.** If you disagree with the school's evaluation, you may ask for an independent educational evaluation at public expense. The school must pay, or file for due process to defend its evaluation.

The annual rhythm

The IEP must be reviewed at least once a year. You do not have to wait for the annual meeting. You can request an IEP meeting at any time during the year, in writing, when something is not working or when your child's needs change.

Keep the procedural safeguards notice the school gives you at least once a year. It is the full, official version of these rights, including mediation, state complaints, and due process.

PREPARATION TIMELINE

Four weeks out, without the scramble

Most stress comes from doing everything the night before. Spread the work out. Each week has one focus, and each task takes less than an hour.

About four weeks before

[ ] Confirm the date, time, place, and who is invited. Reply in writing if you need a different time or an interpreter.

[ ] Ask, in writing, for draft documents, evaluation reports, and progress data at least a few school days before the meeting so you can read them in advance.

[ ] Start a single folder, paper or digital, for this meeting. Everything goes in it.

Two to three weeks before

[ ] Read the current IEP. Mark each goal: met, partly met, or no real progress. Note the data the school used.

[ ] Fill in the child snapshot on page 4 and the goals worksheet on page 5.

[ ] Gather report cards, work samples, discipline or attendance records, and any private evaluations or medical notes you want the team to consider. Share private reports in advance if you want them discussed.

The week before

[ ] Send your parent concerns in writing (template on page 10). Keep it to one page if you can.

[ ] Choose who will come with you for support. Tell the school who you are bringing.

[ ] Pick your three most important outcomes for this meeting and write them at the top of page 7.

The day before and the day of

[ ] Charge your phone if you plan to record. Check your state and district rules on recording, and tell the team at the start.

[ ] Bring two copies of your concerns and snapshot, one for you and one for the team.

[ ] Arrive a few minutes early. It is fine to ask for a break, and fine to say you need time to read the draft before signing.

WORKSHEET - FILL IN AND BRING

Your child on one page

Teams see scores and service minutes. You see the whole child. This page helps you say, briefly and concretely, what the team should know. Share a copy at the start of the meeting.

Child name: _____ **Grade / school:** _____ **Date:** _____

Strengths and interests

What works at home and in class

Where my child struggles most

What I see coming next year

Think about the next grade, a new building, more independent work, or life skills. What will your child need to be ready?

> **Make it specific.** "Reading is hard" starts a conversation. "He reads about 40 words a minute in third grade text and guesses at longer words, so science worksheets take twice as long" gives the team something it can measure and act on.

WORKSHEETS

Records organizer and goal check

Records to gather

Document	Date	Have it? Notes
Current IEP and last progress reports		
Most recent evaluation (eligibility) report		
Report cards and state / district test results		
Attendance and discipline records, if relevant		
Private evaluations, therapy or medical notes		
Work samples that show the concern		

Goal check: is each goal measurable?

A strong annual goal names what the child will do, under what conditions, how well, and by when, and how progress will be measured. Use this check for last year's goals and for any new draft.

Goal in plain words	Baseline	Target and date	Progress data seen?

If a goal has no baseline, ask where the starting number came from. If progress reports only say "making progress," ask for the actual numbers, graphs, or work samples behind that phrase.

IN THE MEETING

Questions worth asking

You do not need to ask all of these. Circle the ones that fit your child and check them off as the team answers.

Present levels

- What data shows where my child is starting this year?
- How does the disability affect involvement and progress in general education?
- Which concerns from my written input are included, word for word or in substance?

Goals and progress

- How will progress be measured, and how often will I get reports?
- What happens if my child does not make expected progress by midyear?
- Which goals are academic, which are functional, and are both covered?

Services

- How many minutes, how often, where, and with whom for each service?
- Is instruction one to one, in a small group, or in class, and why is that the right fit?
- Who provides each service, and what training do they have?

Accommodations and placement

- Which accommodations happen every day, and who makes sure they happen?
- How much time will my child spend with nondisabled peers, and what supports make that work?
- What options did the team consider before this placement, and why were they set aside?

Behavior, safety, and daily life

- If behavior is a concern, is there a functional behavior assessment and a behavior plan, and can I see the data?
- How will the school handle absences, service make ups, and staff changes?
- For older students: what is the transition plan for life after high school, and who owns each step?

> **A useful follow up to any answer:** "Can you show me that in the document?" If it matters, it should be written in the IEP, not only said out loud.

WORKSHEET - USE DURING THE MEETING

Meeting notes

Date / time: _____ Who was present and their roles:

My top three outcomes for today

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What was agreed

What was proposed or refused, and the reason given

Open items and who owns them

Item	Owner	By when

Star anything you were told would be in the IEP. When the final copy arrives, check the starred items first.

BEFORE YOU SIGN

Reading the draft, line by line

Do not let a long document rush you. You can take the draft home to read in most cases. Ask for a clean copy of everything, including prior written notice, before you decide.

Check the service grid closely

- Each service names what it is, how often it happens, how long each session is, where it happens, and the start and end dates.
- Vague words are a warning sign. Watch for "as needed," "consult," or minutes with no frequency. Ask what that looks like in a normal school week.
- Check that related services, transportation, and extended school year were discussed and are either included or clearly declined with a reason.

Accommodations are not modifications

Accommodation: how the child learns and shows learning	Modification: what the child is expected to learn
Extended time, text read aloud, chunked directions, preferential seating, assistive technology	Reduced or altered curriculum, alternate standards, significantly changed assignments or grading

Both can be appropriate. The point is to know which one your child is getting, subject by subject, and what it means for credits and a diploma for older students.

> **Present levels drive everything.** If the present levels section is thin, copied from last year, or missing your input, goals and services built on it will be thin too. Ask the team to fix that section first.

WHEN IT DOES NOT GO AS HOPED

If you disagree, and what to do after

If you disagree in the room

- Stay specific. Name the goal, service, or placement you disagree with and the data behind your concern.
- Ask the team to record your disagreement in the meeting notes and to give you prior written notice for any refusal.
- Ask for a break or a second meeting. You do not have to sign agreement on the spot to end the meeting politely.
- Where your state allows it, you may be able to consent to the parts you agree with so services can start, and note the parts you do not accept. Ask how partial consent works in your state before you sign.
- If the disagreement continues, IDEA provides mediation, state complaints, and due process. Each has its own timeline, so get advice early from your state Parent Center or a special education advocate or attorney.

After every meeting

[ ] Send a short thank you email the same day that restates what you understood was agreed (template on page 10). Your email becomes part of the record.

[ ] When the final IEP arrives, compare it with your notes on page 7. Flag differences in writing right away.

[ ] Calendar the progress report dates and the annual review date.

[ ] File the signed IEP, notices, and your notes together.

[ ] In the first month, check in: are services and accommodations actually happening as written? Ask early and in writing if they are not.

> **Stay put, in plain terms:** if you file for due process over a placement dispute, your child generally stays in the current placement while the case is pending, unless you and the school agree otherwise. Get advice before relying on this.

COPY, ADAPT, AND SEND

Templates and sources

1. Parent concerns (send before the meeting)

Dear IEP team, ahead of our meeting on [date], here are my main concerns for [child]: (1) [concern, with a brief example], (2) [concern], (3) [concern]. My priorities for this year are [priorities]. Please include this letter with the meeting documents. Thank you, [name, date]

2. Request for records or an evaluation

Dear [name], I am writing to request [copies of / an evaluation for] [child, date of birth] regarding [area of concern]. Please let me know the next steps and timeline in writing. If consent forms are needed, please send them to me at [email]. Thank you, [name, date]

3. Follow up after the meeting

Dear team, thank you for meeting on [date]. My understanding is that we agreed to [list agreements, services, and dates]. I understood that [name] will [action] by [date]. Please let me know in writing if any of this differs from your understanding, and please send the final IEP and prior written notice when ready. Thank you, [name, date]

Where to get free help

- **Parent Centers.** Every state has a federally funded Parent Training and Information Center that helps families with special education questions at no cost. Find yours through the Center for Parent Information and Resources at parentcenterhub.org.
- **Protection and Advocacy.** Each state has a designated agency that protects the rights of people with disabilities and can advise on education disputes.
- **Your state education agency** publishes its own procedural safeguards, timelines, and state complaint forms.

Sources and basis: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. sections 1400 and following, and its regulations at 34 CFR Part 300, including parent participation, prior written notice, consent, evaluations, and IEP content. This toolkit summarizes those rules in plain language. It is general information for families, not legal advice, and it does not replace your state's rules or advice about your child's specific situation.

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