

# Transcript — Experts answer episode 36: IEPs

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## **[0:00] Intro**

**[Description:** A person with long wavy brown hair wearing a green sweater sitting against a dark blue background.]

**Stephanie DeLussey:** What is an IEP? And how do I get one for my child?

**[Description:** The camera pulls out to show Stephanie next to a table with a see-through box on it labeled "The Internet" that has colored wires in it.]

I'm Stephanie Delussey, a dual-certified special education teacher with over a decade of experience. And today, I'll be answering the internet's biggest questions about IEPs.

**[Description:** As Stephanie says "internet," she points to the box and the lights in the box turn on. The sound of a light switch is heard.]

**[Description:** The camera zooms out and the title of the episode appears onscreen. Upbeat music starts playing.]

**[On-screen text:** Experts answer the internet's biggest questions. IEPs.]

**[Description:** A piece of paper "prints" out of "The Internet" box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

## **[0:19] What is an IEP?**

An IEP is an Individualized Education Program, which is an acronym that describes the educational roadmap that this individualized plan is going to give your student with a disability.

For example, your child with ADHD or dyslexia might receive an IEP to get those extra supports, accommodations, and modifications to help them be successful with their learning.

This might look like extra time on a test or the student getting a math tutor that gives them that more personalized, individualized instruction in math.

**[Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

### **[0:50] What's the difference between an IEP and a 504 plan?**

This is the answer the entire Internet wants to know. An IEP is governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, that is a federal law. And the 504 plans are covered under the 504 Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which is a civil rights law.

With both an IEP and a 504 plan, your students are going to receive accommodations; however, your IEP is going to be more robust.

With an IEP, you're going to have present levels, IEP goals, more accommodations, modifications, related service providers, a least restrictive environment, and so much more.

**[Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

## **[1:29] How do I know if my child needs an IEP?**

Chances are, you already know the answer to this, but let's talk about it. There is a difference between a child struggling for a little bit of time and a child struggling for a prolonged period of time.

So, here are four red flags to look out for if you think your child may need an IEP.

**[Description:** Stephanie holds up four fingers.]

Number one: Your child is coming home from school every single day crying and stressed out.

**[Description:** Stephanie holds up two fingers.]

Number two: Maybe homework is an absolute battleground every single night at home. They don't want to do it, they're unable to do it, and you have no idea to help to even get them to sit down at the table to finish their homework.

**[Description:** Stephanie holds up three fingers.]

Number three: Parent-teacher conferences give you the scaries because you're really, really tired of hearing that your child is falling behind.

**[Description:** Stephanie holds up four fingers.]

And number four: It might sound basic, but bad grades. This could be an indicator that your child is struggling in school. Bad grades don't suggest

that a student needs an IEP, but it is one way that you can tell that maybe your student might need a little extra help.

Like I said in the beginning, you're already here because you probably already have that feeling in your gut. So, I want you to trust it. If you feel like your child is struggling with any of the things that I mentioned or something else, reach out to your school's team to ask for an IEP evaluation.

**[Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

## **[2:39] How do I get an IEP for my child?**

I cannot stress this enough: Make sure that you put it in writing that you're requesting a special education evaluation for your child.

Why are we putting this in writing? Because the IEP process is just that — it's a process, and we want to make sure that we have a paper trail of documentation along the way.

The first step is reaching out to your child's teacher. They're your first line of defense for all things IEPs. From there, you can reach out to your school's administrator and anyone else who works with your child.

**[Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

### **[3:10] The school says my child doesn't need an IEP. I don't agree. What do I do?**

I first want to acknowledge all of the emotions that come from this denial of receiving an IEP for your child. But I also want to let you know that this is not the end and it's just the beginning of another process.

The first thing you should do is ask for the data that they used to make this decision, and ask for it in writing. Again, we're asking for it in writing because it creates that paper trail.

You also have the right to ask for an independent educational evaluation, or IEE, if you don't agree with the school's findings on that evaluation.

And, this is your time to get informed. I suggest becoming familiar with your state Department of Education's procedural safeguards because disagreement is not the end; it's only the start to a new process.

**[Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

### **[3:59] My child's teacher isn't following their IEP. What should I do?**

One strategy that I like to use in my classroom is connection before correction. And I think that's a valid strategy to use here as well.

The first thing that you should do if you feel like your child's teacher is not following the IEP is reaching out to your child's teacher.

It's important to repair that connection first because maybe there was a miscommunication, or maybe they didn't send home some data. Or, this is also a great time for you to ask those clarifying questions that you have been dying to ask.

Just remember that teachers are human, too. But there is another level of support if that reaching out doesn't solve the issue. Reach out to your child's administrator to take the next step.

**[Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

#### **[4:42] How long does the IEP process take?**

It's important to remember that IEP timelines differ state to state. The basic guidelines come back to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or the IDEA.

The process can take anywhere from 60 to 90 days once you as the parent provide consent for that evaluation.

If you find that the process is taking a little bit longer than that, reach out to your child's teacher, but also become familiar with your state's procedural safeguards. Those have your protections and your rights, and your child's protections and rights under the special education law.

**[Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

## **[5:22] My child just got an IEP. What happens next?**

Documentation and implementation begin immediately after an IEP is adopted. All teachers and professionals who work with your child are going to get a copy of your child's IEP so they know exactly how to implement it. And you will be receiving progress notes along the entire way.

One thing that I would love to see more parents do at home is to talk to your child about having an IEP. What the IEP is, what that means, and what that might look like for your child in their classroom. I know this might feel really uncomfortable, but it's really going to promote those self-advocacy skills within your child.

Oh, and by the way, which part of the IEP process confuses you the most? Let us know in the comments.

**[Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

## **[6:01] What should I expect at an IEP meeting?**

IEP meetings are collaborative in nature, so you should expect to share any and all data that you have on your child. This might mean medical records. This might mean things that you're noticing in the home that you feel like your child is struggling with at home.

IEP services don't stop and start just at school. This is the time to bring all of your concerns to the IEP table.

[**Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

### **[6:31] How do I prepare for an IEP meeting?**

As the parent, you should receive a proposed IEP draft. If you haven't received one or have never received one, make sure you reach out to your child's IEP team to ask for one.

That proposed draft is going to include the present levels, which is all data, and the IEP goals that are proposed based off of that data.

You'll also want to bring your own notes, bring your own data, prepare any questions, have any documentation ready, and be ready to discuss any barriers that are getting in the way of your child's learning.

[**Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

### **[6:57] What are the most common mistakes parents make at an IEP meeting?**

There are two common mistakes that we most frequently see as teachers.

The first one is that parents just sign the IEP without really knowing what it says or what it means.

And the second one is when parents want a specific classroom or teacher for their child without knowing if that's the best placement for their child's needs.

[**Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

## **[7:22] How often is an IEP updated?**

At minimum, IEPs are updated annually, but that doesn't mean that's the only time that your child's IEP can be updated.

IEPs are living, breathing documents, and you can have an update at any time throughout the year.

This is important information to know because your child's IEP could be updated due to them making progress on their IEP goals. Or maybe they're not making progress on their IEP goals, so they need more supports to help them make progress. Or maybe we want to change out how much service time they're getting.

The IDEA protects your right to request changes to your child's IEP, request another IEP meeting, or even request mediation or file a due process complaint.

Your rights as the child's parent are outlined in your state's procedural safeguards. Your school should have given you a copy. But if you cannot find it or they didn't give you a copy, go to your state's Department of Education website, search for that special education department, and look for procedural safeguards.

[**Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

## **[8:16] What should be in an IEP?**

What's important to remember here is that every child's IEP needs to be individualized, but they're all going to have the same parts.

You're going to have the present levels of academic and functional performance, where all of the data about your child is going to be.

You're also going to have your annual IEP goals, accommodations and modifications, related services — like speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, physical therapy.

You're also going to have the service times, which is how many minutes your child is going to receive, let's say, in math services or reading and language arts services.

From there, you'll also have the least restrictive environment, which is what classroom or what setting your child is going to be in and where they're going to learn.

There's a lot of other parts here, but that's the basic rundown of what should be in your child's IEP.

**[Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

## **[9:05] Can I get an IEE, or independent educational evaluation?**

Yes. If you disagree with the school's evaluation findings, you can request an IEE at the public's expense. What that means is no cost to you.

Generally, what this looks like is the school will provide you with a list of qualified evaluators. They will do the evaluation outside of school, so you will take your child there. And then you will provide those IEE results, or those eval results, to the child's school, and then you'll come back to the table to determine eligibility again.

**[Description:** The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

## **[9:36] How often do teachers really look at IEPs?**

Can I fill you in on a dirty little teacher secret? It's not as often as you think.

**[Description:** Stephanie puts her hand up to her face to mimic whispering.]

While you may think we're looking at student IEPs maybe every day or every week, the truth is, we're probably looking at them every other week, maybe once a month.

We know our students' IEPs like the back of our hand. You could ask us which student has an IEP goal for this or which student receives this accommodation, and we could tell you just like that.

[**Description:** Stephanie snaps her fingers. The next paper "prints" out of the box. Stephanie pulls it out and reads it.]

## [10:08] What are some surprising IEP accommodations?

Some of these might really surprise you. The first one is like a weighted lap pad, a weighted vest, or even weighted ankle or wrist bands.

[**Description:** Stephanie touches the tops of her legs, points to her body, and wiggles her wrists.]

The second surprising accommodation is just a thicker pencil. This accommodation helps students who need more help with a fine motor grasp.

And the third surprising accommodation is left-handed scissors. Even something as simple as left-handed scissors can be an accommodation.

These accommodations might be surprising, but it's important to remember that accommodations don't lower the expectation; they simply remove the barrier to help your child thrive.

[**Description:** Split screen swipe to Stephanie in a black long-sleeve shirt on one side of the screen and a video link and text on the other.]

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**[On-screen text and description:** More videos. Thumbnail of a video titled: "[Opportunity Gap: 3 hidden IEP benefits every parent should know](#)"  
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