

Some Common Mistakes Parents Make During the ARD Meeting

It is important that parents become informed and involved in their child's education. The more skills you have and the more information you learn, the better you can advocate for your child. When doing research, keep in mind there are differences from state to state. Parents tend to make some common mistakes during the ARD meeting. The following are a few of the common mistakes and some suggestions for avoiding them:

1. Believing the professionals are the only experts.

It can be very intimidating to sit at a table with several educators and professionals. Professionals/Educators do bring a great deal of knowledge and experience to the table. Although most parents do not have a background or degree in education, they have a great deal of knowledge and experience regarding their child. Parents are experts in their own right; they also provide historical information and the big picture from year to year. They know what works and does not work with their child and can be a great asset to the IEP team.

Parents have an intuitive sense as to what is appropriate for their child. After working with parents for nine years, we are still amazed at how parents are usually intuitively correct about what will work for their child. We encourage parents to follow their hunches. If something does not sound right, check it out. Usually after some research, parents will discover their hunch was correct.

2. Not making requests in writing.

Any request a parent makes needs to be in writing. This includes requests for assessments, ARD meetings, correspondence, related services, etc. Written requests are important because they initiate timelines that the school district must follow in response to your request. When you have a discussion by phone with a school official, write a letter or email that briefly outlines what you talked about. Documenting your conversations helps prevent miscommunication.

It is important for parents to write exactly what they think their child needs and list why they think it is educationally necessary before the ARD meeting. This helps parents think through why they are requesting a service for their child. At this point, the ARD committee has one of two choices: the committee can accept or deny the request. If the committee denies the request, then they must follow the procedural safeguards in IDEA and provide written notice of why they are denying the parents' request. This method makes it difficult for the committee to tell parents "no" without thinking through the options. If the request is not written down, the school district is not obligated to provide the service.

3. Allowing the assessment information to be presented for the first time at the ARD meeting.

Parents are entitled to have the assessment information explained to them before the ARD meeting. It is important that parents contact the person who administered the assessment and ask for a copy of the report and meet with them to explain the report several days before the meeting. A face-to-face meeting is not always possible, however asking for it is a good practice. This enables the parents to think through the information before making decisions for their child. If all IEP decisions are based on the information from the assessment, it only makes sense for the parents to be knowledgeable and informed about the assessment results in a way they can understand.

4. Accepting goals and objectives that are not measurable.

Measurable goals and objectives are paramount for your child's IEP. Without measurable goals and objectives, it is difficult to determine if your child has had a successful school year. In working with parents, we have encountered many IEP goals and objectives that are not measurable.

All goals and objectives should come from assessment data. Assessment has four different components: 1) Formal assessment (i.e., WIAT, Woodcock-Johnson, KTEA), 2) Informal assessment (i.e., District Benchmarks, classroom work), 3) Teacher/parent observation, and 4) Interviews. After the information has been collected about the student it is compiled into an assessment report. Recommendations on how to work with the student are listed toward the end of the report. If you receive an assessment report that does not give recommendations for potential goals and objectives, the assessment is not complete.

After the assessment has been completed, the ARD committee determines the student's Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) and states what the student is currently able to do. The committee then develops draft goals and objectives. The draft goals and objectives remain in draft form until the ARD committee, including the parent, accepts them. The goals state what the student is expected to accomplish by the end of the year. Objectives break the goals down into increments. For example:

Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) Example

Here is part of a PLAAFP statement for reading:

Anthony reads 80 words per minute in high interest, low level adapted text at the 3rd grade-level with fewer than 5 errors in 4 out of 5 trials (based on informal reading inventories* and timed fluency tests*) *data sources are not required to be included in a PLAAFP

Goal:

In 36 instructional weeks, using 5th grade-level text, Anthony will fluently read 80 words per minute with fewer than 5 errors in 4 out of 5 trials.

Objectives

In the first 10 weeks, Anthony will be able to read 4th grade level text, with teacher assistance, at 80 words per minute with fewer than 10 errors in 4 out of 5 trials.

In the next 10 weeks, Anthony will be able to read 4th grade level text, without teacher assistance, at 80 words per minute with fewer than 5 errors in 4 out of 5 trials.

In the next 16 weeks, Anthony will be able to read 5th grade level text, without teacher assistance, at 80 words per minute with fewer than 5 errors in 4 out of 5 trials.

TEA-Inclusion Network Resource on Goals:

https://www.inclusionintexas.org/upload/page/0322/Case_Study_7StepIEPProcess_color%20corrected_508.pdf

5. Allowing placement decisions to be made before IEP goals and objectives are written.

Many times, after assessment is discussed, the IEP committee will determine the child's placement. Goals and objectives are always written before placement is discussed. To ensure that the child is placed in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), the ARD committee must determine: *Which of these goals and objectives can best be met in the general classroom?*

With any remaining goals and objectives that cannot be met in the general classroom, the committee determines: *Which of these goals and objectives can be best met in the general classroom with modifications and support?*

This line of inquiry continues until all placement options have been decided upon for all the goals and objectives. The committee must always start with the LRE and then work toward a more restrictive

environment only as necessary. IDEA is very clear that the ARD committee must always consider the general education classroom as the first option for students with disabilities.

6. Allowing your child's IEP meeting to be rushed so that the school staff can begin the next meeting.

ARD meetings may be held one right after another. There is no problem with this practice if the members of the committee feel that all issues have been adequately discussed. Many times, however, parents feel rushed. It is important that all issues are adequately addressed before ending the meeting. When the educators have not planned adequate time to address all relevant issues, parents can request that the ARD team meet again at a more convenient time to further discuss your child's education.

7. Not asking a lot of questions.

It is very important to ask questions and lots of them. Educators use many terms and acronyms specific to special education. Parents may become confused when these terms are used during the ARD meeting. This can add to the frustration that a parent may already be feeling when they do not understand what is being said. It is important to ask what the terms or acronyms mean. Unless a parent has a background in special education, they are not expected to know the terms and acronyms. Informed decisions cannot be made when parents do not understand what is being discussed.

Intensifiers / Weakners

Statements vs. questions

- You are.... / Are you...?

1st vs. 3rd person

- I feel... I find.... / It seems... Some find...

Frequency

- Always, never / Sometimes, occasionally

Responsibility

- You seem... / I'm having trouble..., We are

Focus

- Look at person / Look at group

Certainty

- Is..does..clearly... / Could..may..possibly

Some Questions Parents Can Ask

- Can I tell you about my child's strengths at home?
- Can you help me have a clear picture of where my child is now academically?
- Can you further explain how I will be notified of what skills my child has learned in Reading?
- May I have more details about the supports that will be in place to help him achieve his goals?
- Because there are multiple teachers who will be working with my child, can I have a clearer picture of who will do what?

Parking Lot for Questions:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=Q5uGEvXswkWfgV2w21fGIYL5Mi4ReDNOtOCdxTvX6VNUMFZVT0NGRDFKMUtUUjk5RVUwNU9HUkk0Mi4u>

