


UNDERSTANDING THE IEP PROCESS & SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES:

- ▶ Bridging the clinical ABA experience to the public school setting
- ▶ Planning and advocating tips for parents

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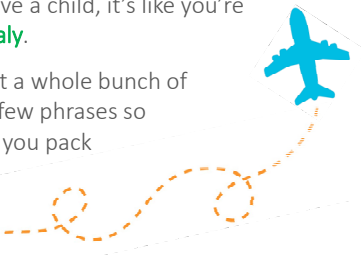


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WELCOME TO HOLLAND

When you're going to have a child, it's like you're planning a vacation to **Italy**.

You're all excited. You get a whole bunch of guidebooks. You learn a few phrases so you can get around, and you pack your bags and head for the airport.




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Only when you land, the stewardess says,

"WELCOME TO HOLLAND!"

You look at one another in disbelief and shock, saying,


"HOLLAND? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I SIGNED UP FOR **ITALY**."



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SPECIAL EDUCATION


- ▶ Navigating the education system will be different for a parent of a child with special needs
- ▶ You will learn a language other parents do not know
- ▶ You did not sign up for this, but the more fluent you become the better you will be able to advocate for you child in the years to come



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▶ Your child may need a lot of special education support or may need only minimal support but:

YOU WILL BE THE MOST IMPORTANT MEMBER OF HIS or HER IEP TEAM



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REVIEW & TERMINOLOGY


- ▶ IDEA (Individuals with Disability Education Act) entitles **all** individuals to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
- ▶ Getting to know IDEA will be very important as it is the basis of your child's rights
- ▶ Detailed information: <http://idea.ed.gov>



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▶ It is also important to know about our local and state policies regarding special education:
<http://www.mpas.org/resources/special-education-manual>

▶ Being well-informed and actively engaged in all aspects of your child's special education will make an enormous difference in your level of satisfaction and your child's success



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IEP = Individualized Education Program:

▶ Foundation for your child's education

▶ Developed by an IEP team of which **you are a member**

▶ Consider the IEP as a **process** not only a document

▶ IEP process has **many parts** and understanding them is critical




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IEP includes a **meeting** and a **document**:

▶ The **meeting** by law is somewhat formal and is the planning session to determine what your child needs to be successful in school


▶ The **document** puts the decisions of the meeting in writing and is a contract to which the district is bound



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The IEP document includes:


- ▶ What **programs, supports and services** will be provided to your child
- ▶ What **goals and objectives** will be worked on during the school year
- ▶ In what **educational setting** those will take place based on your child's individual strengths and needs



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TYPES OF IEP MEETINGS

- ▶ **Initial IEP** = First IEP for a child with a school district
- ▶ **Annual IEP** = IEPs are updated each year at least
- ▶ **MET (IEP)** = Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team where a child's initial/first or ongoing special education eligibility is determined or modified



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- ▶ Parent may request a new IEP **at any time** if they have concerns about a child's programs or services.
- ▶ Requests should be **put in writing** and school districts have **30 school days** to schedule a new IEP.
- ▶ Reminder: **Not all concerns** need to be addressed with a new IEP!!



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IEP MEETING - MET

- ▶ MET (Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team) purpose is to determine under which **special education eligibility** will a child receive services
- ▶ A child's special education eligibility may change over time and must be considered **every three years** after the initial determination (first MET and IEP)



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- ▶ **ECDD (Early Childhood Developmental Delay)** can only apply to children through age seven and identifies delays in more than one area
- ▶ **Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)**
- ▶ **Speech and Language Impaired**, Cognitively Impaired, Severely Multiply Impaired, Emotionally Impaired, Otherwise Health Impaired, Hearing Impaired, Visually Impaired



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WHO ATTENDS THE IEP?

- ▶ Under **IDEA** certain people **must** attend an IEP.
- ▶ Some attendees may serve more than one role.
- ▶ Attendees should include general education teacher, special education teacher, evaluating personnel, school administrator (principal or special education administrator) **child or parent as advocate.**



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▶ May also include translator if needed; transition personnel for next level of education; **anyone with special expertise and knowledge about your child** (ABA team, outside treatment providers, family member, caregiver)




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WHEN & WHERE?

▶ Typically take place at school during the day, but may be arranged before or after to meet parent’s needs

▶ School should make every effort to reach an agreeable date/time with you and document that effort in a letter, email or phone call

▶ School should provide several options for you to be able to attend the IEP meeting




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STEP BY STEP

▶ **Introductions and signing in** as attendees


▶ **Confirm demographic data is accurate:** emails, phone, address, etc.

▶ **Statement of the purpose of the IEP:** initial, annual, transition, change in eligibility, etc.



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- ▶ Review/confirm current eligibility for special education services: why is the child receiving special education services (under what eligibility)
- ▶ Parent priorities and concerns: this is the first opportunity for you to be heard and to speak on your child's behalf. It is important that you are prepared as this section drives much of the rest of the IEP decisions.



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PARENT PRIORITIES & CONCERNS

- ▶ Be prepared to briefly and succinctly state as the expert on your child the following:
- ▶ His/her unique gifts/strengths
- ▶ What your child needs to learn to do that they cannot currently do (i.e., level of functioning across a variety of areas)




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- ▶ Your concerns about academic, social, behavioral needs
- ▶ Concerns about their progress, program/placement (classroom) or services (speech, OT, PT, social work) during the previous year.
- ▶ IEPs are "needs driven" documents so they can sometimes appear to focus on what a child cannot or does not do yet and forget to highlight what a child is good at and loves to do...




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- ▶ Stating **strengths** is important as these can be capitalized upon when teaching a child many different skills. They also help others to make sure learning is tied to **individual interests and motivations** whenever possible.
- ▶ Suggest being **very specific** and prepare this statement in advance of your IEP



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- ▶ **Parent Priorities and Concerns** will drive IEP goals/objectives, programs and services, and supplemental aids and services.



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BE SPECIFIC!

- ▶ Be specific enough to imagine an IEP goal being written to directly address the concern
- ▶ **Example priority/concern:** *We really want James to be more independent when in the classroom*
- ▶ **Should be addressed in IEP goal:** *James will transition between activities within the classroom with verbal prompt only 80% of opportunities*




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- ▶ Priorities and concerns can also drive placement/ programs and services such as how much **time** and **when** a child participates with general education peers.
- ▶ **Example priority/concern:** *Our child benefits when in the presence of other children for the social opportunities present during that time. He/she is especially good at drawing, art/fine motor activities so we would like him to participate in art with other children.*




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- ▶ **Placement/programs (inclusion):** *Child will participate with adult support in art class two times weekly (specials)with general education peers*



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- ▶ **Sample concern:** *Our child has challenging behavior when he does not get his way. These tantrums are isolating and often mean time away from important instruction.*
- ▶ **Should be addressed in Supplemental Supports and Services:** *Child needs a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) implemented daily by all staff with whom he interacts and needs the data to be reviewed and adjustments made by someone trained to do so.*



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TIPS FOR PREPARING

- ▶ Generate a **statement** (one to two paragraphs) that can be typed right into the document by the recorder/facilitator. Email this in advance of your IEP.
- ▶ You can also ask for it to be **attached** to the IEP.
- ▶ **Practice** sharing priorities and concerns the night before making certain to be specific!



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PLAAFP

Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)

- ▶ Teacher, service providers (speech, OT, special educators) provide/share the **status of a child's current levels** across many areas based on assessments and documented observations



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- ▶ Report of **progress** from the last IEP
- ▶ Will share what goals are **met** and which are **not met** (if there was an IEP the previous year)
- ▶ May include **assessments and data** on how your child is performing across all areas
- ▶ Should also identify how your child's special education eligibility **impacts their ability** to function/ make progress in school across core areas.



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Present levels may include:

- ▶ *Cognitive/Academic skills*: reading, math, written language
- ▶ *Communication*: receptive language (understanding), expressive language (use of words) and speech (talking)
- ▶ *Adaptive/Daily living*: self-help, eating, dressing, toileting
- ▶ *Social skills*: making friends, interaction with peers
- ▶ *Behavior*: challenging behavior or behaviors that interfere with learning



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- ▶ *Sensory skills*: hearing, seeing, etc.
- ▶ *Mobility*: getting around in school and the community



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Present levels should be described in a manner that (is):

- ▶ *Objective/Observable* (can you picture/see the skill/behavior in your mind)
- ▶ *Data-based* (how is it being measured and how its the measurement being compared over time)
- ▶ Includes what *prompts* if any are being used (what level of independence)
- ▶ States *criteria* used to determine mastery



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IMPACT STATEMENTS

Reading

- ▶ **PLAAFP:** Results of standardized testing indicates David’s basic reading skills are at the first grade level (standard score 70) which is significantly below second grade level.



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- ▶ **Resulting impact:** David has difficulty sounding out words, especially longer words; but his comprehension skills are a relative strength. He relies on contextual cues such as pictures when reading.

When writing David frequently misspells words and uses incorrect punctuation. He is much better able to explain himself verbally than by writing.



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Communication


- ▶ **PLAAFP:** Jenny has limited verbal skills and uses many ways to communicate to include signs, pointing, and word approximations when given picture choices.
- ▶ **Resulting impact:** Jenny often is unable to initiate requests, comment on her own or the behavior of others or respond to questions presented to her during instruction.



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GOALS & OBJECTIVES

- ▶ Once your child's present levels/resulting needs have been identified the **TEAM** develops goals for the upcoming year
- ▶ You are a member of the IEP team, and the goals should not be determined solely by the school team
- ▶ Be sure you understand and agree with all goals



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- ▶ Developing well-written, objective and measurable goals is often **not easy**
- ▶ Strongly suggest requesting a **draft** of proposed IEP goals several days in advance of the meeting
- ▶ Review these with your home/private SLP, BCBA, OT, PT




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WELL-WRITTEN IEP GOALS:


- ▶ Describe a **skill** the child will demonstrate
- ▶ Can be **measured** easily and objectively
- ▶ Include **how and where** the skill will be demonstrated (setting/condition)
- ▶ **How long** it is expected to take the child to demonstrate the skill (by what date)




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 Jenny will improve her ability to ask for what she wants throughout the day.


 Jenny will spontaneously request a total of at least 10 different preferred items or actions each week. Jenny will use word approximation paired with a gesture or a sign across at least three settings with at least three people.



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 James will respond to directions following teacher prompts.


 James will independently follow two-step directions presented to the group/class 4/5 opportunities, across three consecutive days (e.g., put away writing work and get out math notebooks please)



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PROGRAMS, SERVICES & SUPPORTS


- ▶ **Programs** =Where your child will spend time during the school day (general education classroom, special education classroom, combination)
- ▶ **Services**=What therapies your child needs to meet his/her goals.
- ▶ **Supports** (Supplemental)=What else might need to be in place for your child to be safe and learn.



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SERVICES: (Related Services=Speech, OT, PT, Social Work, ASD Consultant/Specialist)

- ▶ Related services: speech, OT, PT, social work, etc.
- ▶ Go into IEP with frequency of services in mind
- ▶ Be prepared to state why your child *needs* this level of service
- ▶ Educational *impact* drives services



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- ▶ May not be what your child needs *clinically*, but what will address the *impact* of their disability on education
- ▶ Watch for *wide ranges* (15-30 minutes, 4-8 times per month)!
- ▶ Do the math: make the range *narrower* if needed (above range could be 30 minutes a month or 240 minutes a month)



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SUPPORTS


- ▶ What other supplemental supports (not direct related services) will your child need to be successful in school?
- ▶ These are supplemental items/supports that are identified by the team to be necessary for your child.



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Support includes but are not limited to:

- ▶ Adaptive equipment, assistive technology laptop, device, special software, AAC (communication), adult support, adapted materials, books on tape, peer tutor, training to staff on health plan or behavior plan, collaboration among staff or other specialist (vision, hearing, behavior/autism specialist), safety equipment (harness for bus transportation, seating needs, visual supports/schedules, health-aide (diabetes education), assignments modified to child's level




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Supports:

Think about:


1. Learning
2. Health
3. Safety

- ▶ What will need to be in place for your child to learn, be well and stay safe given their identified needs/challenges ?



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- ▶ **PROGRAMS/PLACEMENT:**
- ▶ **Programs/placement** = where will child spend majority of his/her time in order to work on and meet IEP goals?
- ▶ **Special Education** = instruction specifically designed to meet the needs of a child with a disability
- ▶ Special Education can include the standard grade level curriculum, with adaptations or modifications or an alternative curriculum.



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PROGRAMS/PLACEMENT:

Where will your child spend the majority of their day?

- ▶ Once goals, services and supports have been agreed upon, it is important to consider what **setting** will best support all of those.
- ▶ IEP team must consider a **continuum of options** and discuss why one might be best to meet a child's



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- ▶ May include a combination of both based on a child's **strengths** and **needs**.
- ▶ Special Education is not a **place**; rather, **a set of services and programs** needed to meet a child's educational needs across a school day.
- ▶ **IDEA** (individuals with disabilities education act) strongly prefers a child participates with peers without disability to the greatest extent




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- ▶ IEP team must make every effort to ensure a child be educated in the **least restrictive environment (LRE)**



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- ▶ Placement in **general education** must be the first consideration (can a child's goals, services and supports be addressed in this setting? why? why not?)
- ▶ **Options considered:** Did the team discuss a continuum of placement options and agree upon where educational goals can be best implemented?
- ▶ Do you **agree** with recommendation? If not, ask that it be documented you are not in agreement with the placement recommendation.



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TRANSITION PLANNING/EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR (ESY):


- ▶ Every IEP must address the possibility that a child is preparing for a transition and prepare/plan.
- ▶ Transitions in school include: Early On to early childhood/preschool; early childhood/preschool to elementary; elementary to middle school; middle to high school; high school to post-secondary
- ▶ Every IEP must also address the possibility that a child's disability indicates they would need an extended school year (ESY) =Summer School and Summer Services.



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ESY (Summer School) is based on two considerations:


1. *Regression/recoupment* over natural school breaks (when there is a two-week break, is child able to recoup any skills lost within a reasonable time)
2. *Nature and severity* of a child's disability during a critical period of learning/development



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ALMOST DONE!

- ▶ When the IEP has been completed the district will be making an **offer of FAPE** (Free and Appropriate Public Education)
- ▶ If you are in **full agreement** (and it is your child's first IEP you may be asked to sign in agreement): time to **CELEBRATE** and **BREATHE!** Congratulate yourself!
- ▶ Not all states **require** a parent signature as consent to implement



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- ▶ Recommend taking home IEP and returning it after **thoroughly reviewing** it one more time (*I need a bit more time to review this section again*)
- ▶ If you are **not** in agreement, you can refuse the implementation of the IEP
- ▶ If you are not in agreement the school should provide you with written documentation (**Prior Written Notice**) which will include any items under disagreement and why the district is refusing requests



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IF YOU DISAGREE:

- ▶ Request to **reconvene**: pause the IEP meeting and schedule another meeting to complete it.
- ▶ Request **mediation**: third-party to help come to an agreement on areas in dispute.
- ▶ Request **due process hearing**
- ▶ Contact a **special education advocate or attorney** to review IEP and all your notes



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BEFORE THE IEP

- ▶ Decide **who** you will want to attend
- ▶ Prepare **goals** with others who know your child well (outside therapists, etc.)
- ▶ Know your **rights** (Wrights Law newsletter/website and trainings)
- ▶ Generate a **plan** (priorities and concerns, proposed goals)



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- ▶ Anticipate areas where you will **not agree**
- ▶ Decide if you need an **advocate** with you
- ▶ Write **notes** to help you during the IEP steps make sure your concerns are addressed
- ▶ Consider **audio recording** the IEP if you are concerned about your ability to document (make notes) or if spouse cannot attend (must notify in advance if you intend to record IEP)



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DURING THE IEP

- ▶ Stay focused, keep on track, know exactly where you are in the IEP process
- ▶ Avoid becoming **emotional**; we know anything about our child is potentially emotional it may distract you from the process




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- ▶ Ask clarifying questions, don't accept information if it seems incomplete or inaccurate, and ask for supporting data or documentation
- ▶ Do not allow yourself to feel **rushed** through the process
- ▶ Ask for a **break** if you need to talk those you have brought to help you



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- ▶ Ask to **reconvene** IEP if it exceeds 90 minutes – NO one is going to still be at their best if IEP goes too long
- ▶ **Question** any statements that begin like,
We always ___ for all our kids, or
We don't ever ___ for any of our kids.
- ▶ Remember, the "I" means **INDIVIDUAL !**



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AFTER THE IEP

- ▶ Send a note to school administrator (special education director, principal) stating your **appreciation** for a well-run IEP calling out exceptional team members
- ▶ Send a note to school administrator (special education director, principal) stating your **specific concerns** about the IEP process/meeting, team member contributions (or lack thereof) and any rights you feel were violated




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- ▶ Follow-up with services providers to inquire about **schedules** for services
- ▶ Request **service logs** (speech, OT, etc.) and **session notes** if you feel they are necessary to monitor service delivery to meet IEP requirements
- ▶ Request **progress meeting** for 6-8-weeks to see if any goals need to be adjusted



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Special Considerations COVID-19 School Closures:


- ▶ We are not yet certain how districts will operate for the remainder of the school year 2019/2020
- ▶ If your child has a **current IEP** that is being implemented (i.e., they are in school part of the day) and your IEP is due between April and June 2020 most districts will have these IEPs via remote platform such as Zoom Meeting.



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Special Considerations COVID-19 School Closures:


- ▶ If you **had begun the initial evaluation process** to have your child's IEP to plan for 2020/2021 school year before the COVID closures:
- ▶ Recommend contacting the special education office/director or person with whom you have been communicating to see if the rest of the process can be done remotely so you can finalize placement/programs now for fall 2020.



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Special Considerations COVID-19 School Closures:


- ▶ If you **had not begun** the evaluation process prior to the COVID closures and you do not have a current IEP:
- ▶ Contact your district office of special education and request **an initial evaluation immediately**.
- ▶ If they are not able to schedule one, ask if a MET and IEP can be developed with documents shared by your current ABA provider (Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales, VB-MAPP, Speech and OT evaluations and medical evaluation for ASD).



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Special Considerations COVID-19 School Closures:


- ▶ Medical evaluations, ABA, Speech and OT progress updates and present levels *may be used* to generate the initial IEP until which time the district resumes services and is able to conduct their own evaluation
- ▶ Do not wait until fall if you plan to have your child in public school.
- ▶ The district must do an IEP and determine programs and services if your child will need more support than general education classroom.



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UNDERSTANDING THE IEP PROCESS & SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES:

- ▶ Questions ?
- ▶ Concerns ?



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IMPORTANT RESOURCES

- ▶ Wrights Law Special Education and Advocacy
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/>
- ▶ National Center on Dispute Resolution
<http://www.cadreworks.org>
- ▶ Michigan Office of Special Education
- ▶ Michigan Special Education Mediation Program (MESP)
Toll free – 833-KIDS1ST or 833-543-7178.



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