

# Parental Engagement in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

## BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is the main federal program authorizing state and local aid for special education and related services for children with disabilities. IDEA requires states to provide a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities so that they can be educated to the greatest extent possible along with all other children. IDEA was created to help states and school districts meet their legal obligations to educate children with disabilities, and to pay part of the extra expenses of doing so. Today, approximately 6 million children currently receive special education services.

IDEA has been updated several times since its first enactment as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. In the 1986 reauthorization, Part C (Infants and Toddlers) was developed as part of the law, and in 1990, transition planning was introduced as a requirement. In 1997, Congress authorized grants for parent training and provided a dispute resolution process for parents who file grievances with their state or local education association, thereby strengthening the role of parents in their child's education. In 2004, President Bush signed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, a major reauthorization that worked to remove the barriers separating special education from general education. The 2004 IDEA

reauthorization aligned IDEA with the important principles of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and included an enhanced role for parents and the promotion of accountability for results.

As the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States, the National PTA has been a strong supporter of the IDEA. Through the years, the National PTA has worked to ensure that parental involvement remains a fundamental principle of IDEA and that the rights of children with disabilities, and the rights of their parents, are fully protected. The National PTA has ardently supported school-family collaboration as an important component of successful learning for all children. The upcoming 2010 IDEA reauthorization provides an opportunity for the National PTA to comprehensively address the issues that so urgently affect children with special education needs.

## PARENTAL RIGHTS PROVISIONS UNDER CURRENT LAW

There are several provisions within IDEA regarding parental involvement in education. Following, is an explanation of the key provisions. Specific parental involvement sections of the *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* are referenced below.

## Individual Education Program (IEP): Title 34 CFR §321

IDEA requires children to have an individualized education program (IEP), in order to receive special education services. The IEP includes information about a child's present levels of performance on various tests and measures and includes information about goals and objectives, specifically how the child's educational problems will be addressed. The purpose of the IEP is to set reasonable learning goals for the child and to state the services that the school district will provide.

### The IEP Team

The IEP must be developed with input from the following IEP team members:

- At least one of the child's parents;
- At least one regular education teacher;
- At least one of the child's special education teachers or providers;
- A representative of the school district who is qualified, knowledgeable, and authorized to commit the district to the delivery of resources to the child;
- A qualified professional who can interpret the evaluation of child; and
- Others at the discretion of the parent or the school district and, where appropriate, the child with a disability.

## Parental Rights in the IEP Process: Title 34 CFR §300.322

Parents have the right to be actively involved in the development of their child's IEP. Parents have the

right to be notified of the IEP meeting early enough to ensure that one or both of the child's parents have an opportunity to attend. Parents also have the right to have the IEP meeting scheduled at a mutually agreed time and the right to an interpreter if their native language is not English. The 2004 IDEA includes language that allows parents and the local education agency to agree to use alternative means of meeting participation such as video conferences or conference calls.

## Parent Training Information (PTI) Centers: Title 34 CFR §300.31

Parent Training Information (PTI) Centers provide training, information and support to parents who have a child birth through age 26 with special needs. PTI Centers are authorized in Part D of IDEA and are funded by the U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). There is a PTI Center in each state and some states also have Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs). The CPRCs do the same work as the PTI Centers, but the CPRCs focus on reaching underserved populations, including low income families. Currently there are over 100 PTI Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs) that operate under a unified technical assistance system to provide technical assistance and resources for parents, family members, professionals, and school personnel.

Each PTI Center is mandated to assist parents to better understand the nature of their children's disabilities and their educational, developmental, and transitional needs. PTI Centers assist parents in the development of the their child's IEP, as well as assist parents in obtaining the appropriate information about the range, type, and quality of programs, services, and resources for children with disabilities both in school and at home.



Specifically, the PTI Centers help families:

- Obtain appropriate education and services for their children with disabilities;
- Work to improve education results for all children;
- Train and inform parents and professionals on a variety of special education topics;
- Resolve problems between families and schools or other agencies; and,
- Connect children with disabilities to community resources that address their needs.

To locate the Parent Training Information Center or Community Parent Resource Center in your state, go to <http://www.taalliance.org/ptidirectory/index.asp>

## RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information on the National PTA's recommendations for the reauthorization of IDEA, please see PTA's annual Public Policy Agenda. Available online at:

[http://www.pta.org/PTA\\_PublicPolicyPDF\\_final.pdf](http://www.pta.org/PTA_PublicPolicyPDF_final.pdf)

*If you should have any questions about special education issues, please contact:*

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