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## Tips to Welcome Students and Help Them Effectively Participate in their IEP Meetings

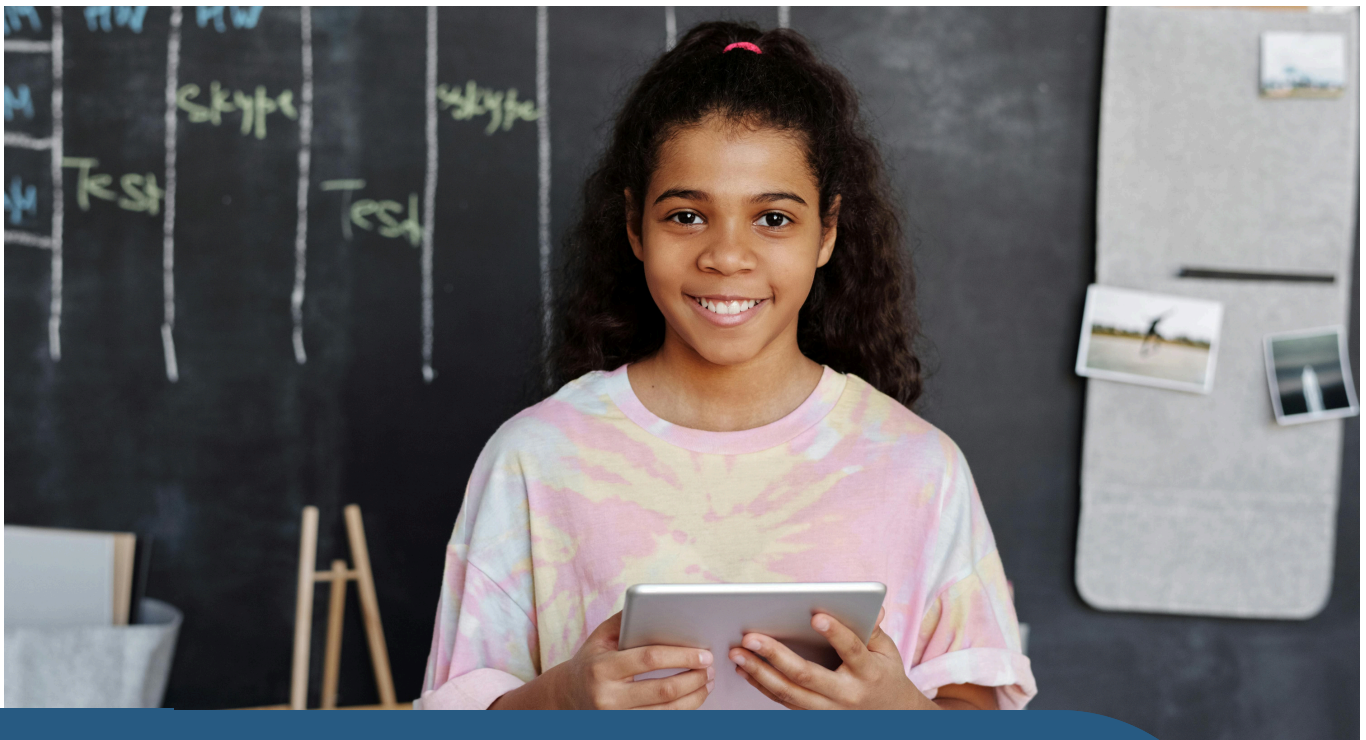


Office of Special Education Programs  
U.S. Department of Education

CADRE produced this document under U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs Cooperative Agreement ALN No. H326X230002, Carmen M. Sánchez, Project Officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education is assumed.

# Including Students at IEP Meetings

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) considers the student to be an important member of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team, and encourages their attendance at IEP meetings, as appropriate. The law requires that students of transition age be invited to the IEP meeting when the team considers post-secondary goals and the transition services needed to assist them in reaching those goals. Including students in IEP meetings, even very young children for a short time, can positively impact the development and quality of their IEPs. When students participate, the focus of the meeting is more likely to remain on the individual needs of that student and encourages more inclusive and collaborative conversations.



## Developmental and age-appropriate participation can help students:

- identify the people involved in supporting their success,
- understand their own strengths, needs, interests, and perspectives,
- comprehend their IEP and see how they can influence what is included, and
- develop and practice self-advocacy skills.

This resource guides adult members of IEP teams in making students of any age feel welcome and helping them to participate effectively in their own IEP meetings.

# Prepare Adults for Meetings



Educate adults on the importance of student involvement. Ensure adults understand that involving students in their own IEP meetings promotes self-advocacy, boosts confidence, and leads to plans that are truly individualized to meet the students' needs.



Provide training and resources. Offer training sessions or workshops for educators, parents, and other IEP team members on how to include students in the meeting. This training might cover best practices, legal considerations, and strategies for effectively communicating with students of different ages and abilities.



**Promote a supportive environment.** Foster a culture within the school and among IEP team members that values and respects the autonomy of students with disabilities. Emphasize the importance of listening to and considering the student's perspectives when making decisions about their education.





# Prepare Students for Meetings

Before the meeting, make sure the student knows what the purpose of the IEP meeting is and what to expect. Help students understand their role, how important they are to the process, and what decisions they might be involved in making.

Encourage students to share their input about their preferences, goals, and concerns. Students may need to be coached on how to participate (e.g., sample language).

Prepare students for the experience of making group decisions and the importance of many voices, including theirs, in deliberations. While not everyone may agree with the decision, the meeting allows everyone's viewpoint to be heard, understood, and considered. Help them understand and accept it is okay to have strong emotions and express them productively.



# Tailor Participation to the Student



**Consider age and development appropriate involvement for each student.** Some students may feel more comfortable presenting their ideas with visual aids. Maybe a picture of them writing their letters or talking with friends will help them participate meaningfully. Students can use support tools like scripts, picture cards, agendas, technology, or slide presentations.



**Make the experience welcoming and encouraging.** If a student is uncomfortable presenting to a group, help them prepare statements around their goals or strengths, or perhaps co-present with their teacher. Teachers and parents can reassure the student that they will be there to help and support them.



**Help the student plan what is important to present at the meeting.** Offer specific topics for the student to share. For example, the student might discuss their favorite assignments from the year or their feelings about a project.

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# Create a Supportive Environment During Meetings

- **Start the meeting with the student and share how the purpose of the meeting is to support them.** Emphasize the importance of and express gratitude for their presence at the meeting.
- **If comfortable, the student could present first at the meeting.** They can introduce themselves and possibly, introduce the people in the room and their relationship with them. Students who are not able to verbalize could gesture to each individual to introduce themselves or use an augmentative and alternative communication device.
- **Find opportunities to invite the student to participate during their meeting.** Ask them directly about their preferences, goals, and any concerns. Listen actively and consider their input.
- **Use student-centered language.** When discussing goals and accommodations, frame the discussion around what the student wants to achieve and how they can be supported.
- **Support the student's understanding and comprehension.** Refrain from using jargon and explain information in a way that the student can understand. When necessary, ask team members to clarify or provide examples to support the student's understanding. Encourage the student to ask team members to provide clarification or an explanation when needed.

- **Provide the student with choices whenever possible.** For example, when discussing accommodations or extracurricular activities, include the student in generating options, as appropriate, or let them choose from a range of options.
- **Facilitate conversation to include the student.** Adults should serve as facilitators of communication between the student and other IEP team members. With the student's permission or understanding, help clarify information, translate the student's input into actionable goals, and ensure that everyone understands the student's perspective. Be alert to speaking for the student instead of including the student. Ask the student directly what they think about an option under consideration or how they feel about a topic the team is discussing.
- **Consider how long a student needs to attend and consult with them about their preferences regarding the extent of their participation.** Offer the student the opportunity to opt out of discussions or be selective about where to include them. Gradually increase the amount of time the student spends at the meeting as their capacity increases. For example, they might start with 10 minutes at the first meeting and increase from there. The student can also arrive later or leave earlier to avoid getting tired or stressed.
- **If there are areas where the team is expected to have disagreements, consider the impact on the student in attending these discussions.** Frame disagreements as positive interactions where the goal is to work together and learn from each other and emphasize how much everyone cares for the student's success.

## As accommodations are discussed:

- Include students in the conversation by asking how the accommodation works for them.
- Ask students if they have suggestions for improvement. What has worked for them? What ideas do they have for improvement?

## As goals are identified:

- Students, particularly older ones, can reflect on their own progress. While data can offer one perspective, students can provide important insight into how they experience their progress.
- Include students in identifying concrete areas where they would like to improve.
- Students may be able to identify something that they struggled with in the past year, giving insight into possible areas for targeted supports.

## Reflect After Meetings

Follow up and reflect with the student after the conclusion of IEP meetings. After the IEP meeting, adults can discuss the outcomes, review any decisions made, and address any questions or concerns the student may have.

Consider the feedback from the student in future planning. Consider how the input from the student can be integrated into the IEP process and improve future meetings. Make adjustments as needed.

*CADRE wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) in the development of this publication.*