

The First Meeting

What happens in an IEP meeting, and the one page nobody else at the table has.



One page to fill in

Federal IDEA. Every claim carries its citation.



SproutKit

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The First Meeting

First edition. Published 2026.

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Print it. Write on it. Hand copies to your child's IEP team. That is what it is for.

Do not resell it, republish it, or distribute it as your own.

ABOUT THE CITATIONS

Every legal claim in this book cites the federal regulation it comes from, and those citations were checked against the source text rather than quoted from memory.

It is still information, not legal advice, and reading it does not create an attorney-client relationship. This book covers federal IDEA. Your state adds rules on top, sometimes with shorter timelines, and outcomes vary by district and by facts a book cannot see.

For advice about your child specifically, your state's Parent Training and Information Center is free. Find yours at parentcenterhub.org.

The First Meeting

Most of what happens in your first IEP meeting is decided before you walk in.

The draft usually exists days ahead of the table. Staff are allowed to write it among themselves, and that drafting session is not a meeting you have a right to attend. **34 CFR 300.501(b)(3)**.

So the ninety minutes you are dreading is a revision session for a document that already exists. The parent who arrives with their own paper is the one making revisions that stick.

This is the paper.

Who this is for

A parent going into their first IEP meeting.

Somebody at the school said the word evaluation, or the testing already happened, and now there is a date on the calendar and a packet you have read four times without absorbing.

You do not need the vocabulary. Where a regulation matters, it is quoted with its number so you can read it yourself and say it out loud.

What is in it

Seven pages, and five of them you write on.

A countdown you date and work backward from. One email to send about two weeks out. Your One Page, which is the thing you hand across the table. Three sentences for three moments. And a page saying where this stops.

Print it. Fill it in by hand. Take the folder with you.

A tablet works until someone starts talking and you are scrolling. Paper does not go to sleep and does not need you to look away from the room.

What this will not do

It will not tell you the room is friendly.

Some of the people at that table will push hard for your child. Some are carrying forty other kids and a budget they did not set. On the day you will not be able to tell those two apart, and nothing in here will help you sort them.

What holds still is the regulation, the document, and the dates. What you asked for in writing, and what came back.

Your Parent Training and Information Center

Every state has one. They are federally funded and they are free to you.

They will go through your child's evaluation reports with you, tell you your state's own timelines, which are sometimes shorter than the federal ones, and explain what a notice you received actually said. Some will sit in a meeting with you.

They are not attorneys and they do not represent you at a hearing. They will tell you when you have reached the point of needing one.

The national directory is at parentcenterhub.org, searchable by state. Call before anything is on fire. The first conversation is easier that way, and they will have your file open the next time.

Before you use any of it

This is information, not legal advice. Every legal claim here cites the federal regulation it comes from so you can read it yourself. Your state adds its own rules on top, and sometimes shorter timelines. Your state's Parent Training and Information Center is federally funded, free, and staffed by people who do this daily. Find yours at parentcenterhub.org.

Start

Turn to the runway. Find the row that matches how many days you have.

What Happens In The Room

Eight people sit down. You know two of their names.

The rest get introduced once, quickly, by first name and job title, in the first ninety seconds while you are still finding a pen. By the time someone says something that matters you have lost track of who is who.

The order it usually goes in

Introductions. Then the evaluation results, read out by whoever ran them. Then present levels, which is the paragraph describing what your child can currently do. Then goals. Then services and minutes. Then placement. Then signatures and the room stands up.

Your items come up somewhere in the middle if you raise them, and at the end if you wait to be asked.

The six seats the district has to fill

The IEP Team must include you, a regular education teacher if your child is or may be in general education, a special education teacher or provider, a district representative, someone who can interpret what the evaluation results mean, and your child when appropriate. **34 CFR 300.321(a)**.

The regulation lists you first, ahead of the teachers.

Anyone else at that table is there because somebody decided they should be.

The seat that can say yes to money

Every other person in that room can agree with you and change nothing.

34 CFR 300.321(a)(4) puts a district representative at that table, someone qualified in specially designed instruction, who knows the general curriculum, and who knows what resources the district actually has available. That last piece is the whole seat.

Sometimes it is a coordinator or a director. Sometimes it is the principal wearing the hat. Sometimes it is the case manager filling their own seat and this one at once, which is legal, and it is also why a warmly received request can quietly go nowhere.

Two things you have going in

You are a member of any group that decides your child's educational placement, not somebody informed of it afterward. **34 CFR 300.501(c)**.

And your copy of the finished document is free. Handing it over at no cost to you is the district's obligation under **34 CFR 300.322(f)**. No fee, no form, no waiting for it to be finalized somewhere.

What you do with this page

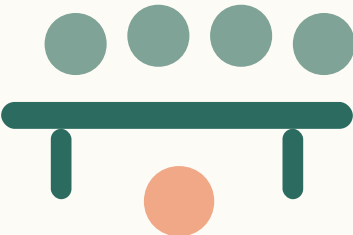
Ask one question in the first two minutes, while people are still settling and nothing is at stake yet.

Who at the table is the district representative today?

It is an ordinary scheduling question. It also tells you which person to aim the expensive ask at, and that is worth knowing before minute fifty rather than after.

Write the answer here, along with everyone else's name as they say it. Nobody will repeat them.

NAME	ROLE	ANYTHING THEY SAID YOU WANT TO COME BACK TO



The Runway

Write your meeting date in the box. Then count backward and fill in the rest of the dates before you do anything else.

Dating the rows is what turns this from a list into a plan.

Meeting date _____

Case manager's name and email

If you have five days instead of fourteen, do the whole two-week column today, in one sitting. Only the first row genuinely needs lead time, and it needs it because the district does.

Two weeks out

DONE	DATE YOU DID IT	WHAT TO DO
☐	_____	Send the email on the next page. It asks for the records, the attendee list, and the draft.
☐	_____	Check the meeting date against whether anyone asked you before setting it. The meeting has to be scheduled at a mutually agreed time and place. 34 CFR 300.322(a) . If the slot does not work, reply and propose two others.
☐	_____	Read the notice for who is coming. The notice must state the purpose, time, and location of the meeting and who will be in attendance. 34 CFR 300.322(b) . If it does not name them, ask now.
☐	_____	Decide whether you are bringing someone. A co-parent, a private therapist, a relative who knows your child well. That is your call to make under 34 CFR 300.321(a)(6) , so tell the district who is coming rather than asking whether you may.

One week out

DONE	DATE YOU DID IT	WHAT TO DO
☐	_____	If nothing has arrived, send one follow-up. Two sentences, referencing the date of your first email.
☐	_____	Read the goals in the draft, if you have it. Mark every goal you cannot picture somebody scoring. Marking only, no fixing.
☐	_____	Write Your One Page. It is three pages on from here. This is the row that carries the most weight in the whole countdown.

DONE DATE YOU DID IT

WHAT TO DO

☐

Write your three asks in the order you want them, and number them. You may not get to all three, and ordering them now keeps the one that matters most off the end.

Your three asks, in order.

1.

2.

3.

The day before

DONE DATE YOU DID IT

WHAT TO DO

☐

Print three copies of Your One Page. One for you, two for the table.

☐

Print the three sentences page and put it on top of the folder.

☐

Read the draft once more, out loud if you can, and write every question in the margin. Reading aloud catches the goals that sound like goals without saying anything.

☐

Confirm the time, the location, and who is coming. Add nothing new to the folder today.

On the day

Bring the folder. Bring a pen.

Attending a meeting and signing at the end of it are two separate acts, and the second one is the one people do because the room is waiting. Asking to take the document home to read is an ordinary request rather than a procedural right, and most parents who ask for a few days get them.

One caution that is specific to a first IEP. Your signature there is consent for services to start, and **34 CFR 300.300(b)** says that if you withhold it the district may not use mediation or a due process hearing to provide the services anyway, and is not considered to be in violation of the requirement to make FAPE available. Your child gets nothing while the signature is missing. So taking a document home to read is ordinary, and leaving it unsigned for a month is a decision with a cost attached.

If you only do three rows

Send the email. Write Your One Page. Number your three asks.

A folder with three things in it beats a folder with nothing.



The Draft Request Letter

One email, sent about two weeks out, changes more about the meeting than anything else in here.

It moves the reading from the table to your kitchen. A proposal read aloud at minute twenty is one you are reacting to on the spot, in front of people, while somebody waits for your face to do something. At home you can mark it up and sleep on it.

Written also beats verbal because written has a date on it. A hallway conversation with the case manager leaves nothing behind.

The three requests do not carry the same weight

The records are law. You can inspect and review all education records related to your child's identification, evaluation, educational placement, and the provision of FAPE. **34 CFR 300.501(a)**. Evaluation reports are education records, and so are progress reports and the assessments behind an eligibility decision. You do not need a reason to ask.

The attendee list is law too. The notice must state the purpose, time, and location of the meeting and who will be in attendance. **34 CFR 300.322(b)**. If the notice came without names, you are asking for something the notice was supposed to carry.

The draft IEP works differently. Federal law does not require the district to give you a draft in advance, and no regulation in here says otherwise. Most districts send it when asked, which is why the ask is in the email. Hold onto the distinction so you know which of the three you can press on and which one usually gets granted as a courtesy.

The email

Copy this. Fill in the brackets. Send it to the case manager and copy the special education director if you have their address.

SEND THIS

Subject: Records and draft request ahead of [child's name] 's IEP meeting on [meeting date]

Dear [case manager's name] ,

I'm writing ahead of [child's name] 's IEP meeting scheduled for [meeting date] . I have three requests.

First, I'd like to inspect and review [child's name] 's education records, including all current evaluation reports, assessment results, progress reports on current IEP goals, and any related service logs. This request is made under **34 CFR 300.501(a)**.

Second, the meeting notice should indicate who will be in attendance, per **34 CFR 300.322(b)**. If the attendee list has changed or was not included, please send me the names and roles of everyone who will be at the meeting.

Third, if a draft IEP or draft goals have been prepared ahead of the meeting, I would appreciate receiving a copy in advance. I understand a draft is a proposal rather than a final document. I find I can participate more usefully when I've had time to read it beforehand.

I'd be grateful to receive these by [date, at least three or four days before the meeting] so I have time to review them before we meet.

Thank you, [your name] [phone number] [email address]

Three things about the wording

The third request says "if a draft has been prepared." That phrasing is deliberate. It asks without asserting a right that does not exist, and it does not put the case manager in a position of having to correct you.

The line about a draft being a proposal rather than a final document is doing quiet work. It tells the team you know the draft is not the decision, which is the thing you most need them to know before you arrive.

Naming the deadline matters more than naming the regulation. "Before the meeting" arrives the morning of. A specific date arrives on a specific date.

When the answer is no, or nothing

No draft, no explanation. Some districts have a blanket policy against sending drafts, usually because a draft that circulates gets treated as a decision. That policy is theirs to have. Reply and ask for the evaluation reports and progress data on their own, since those are records and the answer there is different.

Silence. Send one follow-up around a week out, referencing the date of your first email. Keep it two sentences. Silence is usually a full inbox rather than a position, and a dated follow-up gives you a second entry in the record either way.

The records request goes unanswered. This one you press. Inspect-and-review is [34 CFR 300.501\(a\)](#), and a request that gets no response is worth escalating to the special education director in writing with your original email attached. Your state sets its own timeline for producing records, sometimes shorter than the federal floor, and your Parent Training and Information Center will know what yours is.

They offer to walk you through it on the phone. Take the call. Then send an email afterward saying what you heard, and ask them to correct anything you have wrong. A phone call leaves no record until one of you writes it down, and it may as well be you.

If nothing arrives

Go anyway, with Your One Page written.

Then ask for the draft at the table before discussion starts, and ask for a few minutes to read it. A team that has a draft in front of them can hand you one.

Ten quiet minutes with a document is a reasonable thing to ask for out loud. It is easier than explaining afterward that you signed something you had not read.



Your One Page

Handing out a document changes what the meeting is doing.

A room that has been handed paper stops and reads it. Everyone at that table has spent years being handed documents, and the reflex is automatic. Said out loud at minute forty, the same information gets nodded at and lost, because the person taking notes is writing something else by then.

This is the page nobody else at that table has. They have the file. You have the two hours after school.

Three copies. One for you, two for the table. Hand them out before the first agenda item.

How to fill it in

Write it by hand or type it, either works. Keep it to one side of one page, because two pages is a packet and a packet gets set aside for later.

Strengths go first. They set the frame before the deficit list starts, and the rest of the meeting is a deficit list by design.

Be concrete everywhere. "Struggles with transitions" is a sentence the team already has forty of. "Takes eleven minutes to come inside after recess, every day, and we timed it" is a sentence nobody at that table can produce, and it is the only kind of thing on this page they cannot get from a file.

Do not write a case. The page carries what you know and they do not, and it works better reading like observation than like a closing statement.

What good entries look like

For "what I see at home."

Bad (vague)

Homework is a struggle and it takes forever.

Better (specific)

A twenty-minute worksheet takes us two hours and ends in tears four nights out of five. We started timing it in October. Reading the questions to him cuts it to forty minutes.

For "who your child is."

Bad (vague)

She is a sweet kid who tries hard and loves to learn.

Better (specific)

She can name every bird at our feeder and she taught her little brother to do it too. She will talk to any adult who asks her a real question. She has been building the same LEGO city since March.

For "what I am asking for."

Bad (vague)

More support with reading.

Better (specific)

Reading instruction in a group of no more than four, and a goal that names how many words per minute and when I will be told the count.

The vague versions are not wrong. They are already in the file, written by somebody else, and they give the team nothing to write down.

[Child's full name]

IEP meeting _____ Prepared by _____, parent

Who [child's first name] is

[Three or four sentences. What they are like, what they are good at including things that have nothing to do with school, what they enjoy, what people who like them would say. Write this as a person, not a profile. Somebody at that table has never met your child.]

What is working right now

[One to three of them. A support, a person, a routine, a setting where your child is doing well. Name the specific thing and what tells you it is working, not the general category.]

The three things that must change this year

Ranked. Most important first.

1. [The change you want, in one sentence]

What I see at home.

[The concrete thing you have observed. How often, how long it lasts, what it looks like. A number if you have one.]

What I am asking for. [The specific service, minute count, accommodation, or goal change. If you do not know what to ask for, write what the outcome would look like instead.]

2. [The change you want, in one sentence]

What I see at home.

What I am asking for.

3. [The change you want, in one sentence]

What I see at home.

What I am asking for.

What is not in any report

[The thing no evaluation captured. What happens in the two hours after school, what your child says about the school day, a pattern you have tracked that nobody asked you about, something that changed this year the file does not know yet. Two or three sentences. This is the part only you can write.]

How to reach me

Phone _____ Email _____

[Best times to reach you, and whether you want things in writing]

What to do with it in the room

Hand it out first, before the agenda starts.

I wrote a page about [child's name]. I brought copies for everyone.

Then stop talking and let them read it. Ten seconds of a room reading is worth more than five minutes of you explaining.

Later, when your ask comes up, point at the page instead of repeating the story.

That's number two on the page I handed out.

At the end, ask that your page be attached to the IEP or entered into the record. If nobody says yes at the table, ask again in an email that week.

If you have one hour, not one week

Write the three changes first. Two sentences each, the observation and the ask.

Then write four sentences about who your child is and put them on top.

Skip the rest. A half-page in your handwriting that gets handed out beats a full page that never got printed.

Three Sentences

Three moments come up in almost every first meeting. Here is what to say at each one.

They are plain on purpose. Nothing here is a clever line, because a clever line has to be delivered and these do not. You can say them badly, in a shaky voice, reading off the page instead of looking at the person, and they still do the thing they do.

Print this. Put it on top of the folder.

1. When someone promises something out loud

Can we put that in the IEP?

Someone says they will check in with the teacher weekly. Someone says they will make sure your child gets extra time on tests. Someone says they will keep an eye on it.

None of that gets delivered by the person who said it. It gets delivered by whoever has the document next September, and the person who said it may be in a different building by then.

Ask it every time. It is a short question, it sounds cooperative because it is cooperative, and asking it eight times in one meeting is not rude. The team writes IEPs for a living, and being asked to write something down is the most ordinary request you can make of them.

Then check the copy you receive. "We'll add that" and it being on the page are two different events.

2. When you do not know what a word means

Can you explain what that means in plain language?

Present levels. Specially designed instruction. Least restrictive environment. Push-in. Progress monitoring. Standard scores and percentiles and the difference between them.

The room says these words forty times a week. You do not, and there is nothing behind the fact that you do not. Ask the first time, not the fourth. A term you let pass at minute ten is a term you are still nodding at when it turns up inside the decision at minute fifty.

If the plain-language answer still is not landing, ask for the version with your child in it.

What would that look like for [child's name] on a Tuesday?

3. When they want you to sign right now

I'm going to take this home and read it before I sign.

The pen is on the table, eight people are packing up, and the room is waiting on you. Nobody applied that pressure on purpose. It is what the end of a meeting feels like, and it is why so many parents sign documents they have not read.

You do not have to explain why. If a reason feels better to have, this one is true.

I want to read it against the draft at home.

Before you use this at a first IEP, know what your signature is doing there. On an initial IEP it is consent for the services to begin, and under **34 CFR 300.300(b)** a district faced with a parent who withholds that consent may not use mediation or a due process hearing to provide the services anyway, and is not considered to be in violation of the requirement to make FAPE available. Your child goes without while the signature is missing.

So reading it overnight is ordinary. Leaving it unsigned for weeks is a decision with a price, and it is worth making on purpose rather than by drift.

Two notes on saying them

They work flat. These get weaker with volume. A room hears a raised voice as a problem to be managed and stops hearing the request inside it. Said evenly, the same words are a procedural question, and a procedural question is harder to deflect than an argument.

Write down the answer. Every one of these produces a response. Put it in the margin with a time next to it, in whatever handwriting you can manage while somebody is still talking.

WHAT I ASKED	WHO ANSWERED	WHAT THEY SAID	TIME

There are more of these

Six others exist, for the moments this page does not cover. What to say when a goal has no number in it, when a service drops and nobody says why, when a required person did not come, when a document lands in front of you mid-meeting, and when the ninety minutes runs out with your items still unread.

Those are moments a first meeting sometimes reaches and a second one usually does. The next page says where they live.

Where This Stops

This covers one meeting. The first one.

Getting the records before the day, walking in with a page nobody else has, and three sentences for the three moments that come up in almost every first meeting.

That is the whole scope, and naming it is more use to you than pretending otherwise. A parent who thinks they are covered for everything is the one who gets caught out by the part that was never in here.

What a first meeting does not prepare you for

Being told no. Not the flat kind. The kind that arrives as "let's monitor that and revisit next year," or "we don't have the staffing right now," or "he already gets that in the general education classroom." You leave unsure whether you were turned down at all, and there is nothing to write down because nothing was said plainly.

Reading a goal that measures nothing. "Will improve reading comprehension" survives twelve months of nothing happening, because there was never a number to miss. The IEP must contain measurable annual goals and must describe how progress will be measured and when you will be told. [34 CFR 300.320\(a\)\(2\)](#) and [34 CFR 300.320\(a\)\(3\)](#). Spotting which goals fail that on the page in front of you is a separate skill from knowing the rule exists.

Services shrinking a few minutes at a time. Every service needs a projected start date and an anticipated frequency, location, and duration. [34 CFR 300.320\(a\)\(7\)](#). A drop from 120 minutes to 90 reads fine on its own page, because last year's number is in last year's document and nobody at that table is going to put them side by side.

The year after the meeting. The IEP is a twelve-year relationship. What gets promised in the room and what gets delivered in November are two different records, and only one of them is being kept by the district.

Due process, mediation, and state complaints. All three have filing rules and deadlines that change from state to state. Start with your Parent Training and Information Center at parentcenterhub.org. A parent walking into a hearing with half a procedure is worse off than one who walked in with none.

Where the rest of it is

When They Say No. Twenty sentences a district uses, two pages each. What the sentence usually means, what to say back while you are still in the room, and the email to send afterward. The five in the list above are in there, along with fifteen others. \$27.

The IEP Year. The full runway, the goal audit, the services ledger, all nine sentences, and the quarterly work that makes next year's meeting start from your evidence instead of their draft. Progress report audits, a service delivery log, and the letters that go with each. For the parent who has been through one of these and wants the record built before the next one.

Which one, and when

If your meeting has not happened yet, you already have what you need. Send the email, write your page, and go. If you have come out of a meeting and something in it went sideways in a way you cannot name, that is the first one.

If you are looking at a year of it and you want to walk into next spring holding your own numbers, that is the second one.

What you already have

Whatever you buy or do not buy, you are walking in with a dated email in the record, a page in your handwriting that goes in the file, and three sentences you can read off the paper.

That is more than most first-timers carry, and none of it depends on the room being kind to you.



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This one covers the first meeting. When the answer is no, that is a different problem and it needs different tools.