



Key points:

- **Clarify policies about finalizing, implementing IEPs with parents**
- **Ensure end of IEP meeting summarizes recommendations**
- **Resist making unrealistic promises to appease concerned parents**

Tips to end your next IEP meeting effectively

You're nearing the end of a successful [IEP team](#) meeting. You've checked off all of your agenda items and reached consensus with parents on [placement](#) and services. But you and the district members of your team exit the room without finalizing or signing the document.

Nothing in the IDEA requires a district to sign an IEP and expectations for finalizing the document differ from state to state. But having procedures in place for officially ending a decisive meeting and finalizing the IEP may preserve parents' trust in the process and in your teams, experts say.

Encourage your teams to clarify with parents ahead of time their policy on finalizing IEPs. Also review the recommendations made by parents and school-based team members at the end of the meeting. Just be sure to avoid making any unrealistic promises to parents about what you will implement.

"You have to be strategic about how you communicate to parents what your obligations are," said Miriam Van Heukelem, a school attorney at [Ahlers & Cooney PC](#) in Des Moines, Iowa. "It all comes back to transparency and good communication ahead of time."

Take these steps:

- **Ensure policies are clear to parents:** Discuss expectations and share with parents information about the IEP meeting process and what happens at the end of a meeting, Van Heukelem said. Consider setting up a working group that brings parents, special educators, and administrators together on a regular basis, she said. Or, if you don't have the resources to host regular forums, get the message out to parents in print or electronically about how you conduct and end IEP meetings.

You would want parents to know, for example, that at the end of an IEP meeting, district members of the team may say, "We'll have a final document delivered to you within five or 10 school days," Van Heukelem said. If the parent doesn't challenge any IEP recommendations at that time, then your team may say the recommendations will be [implemented](#) in two weeks.

- **Review recommendations at end of meeting:** Ensure the IEP meeting agenda features a "wrap-up" period at the end of the conference to review the recommendations everyone made during the meeting and anything else that may go into the [prior written notice](#), said Gwen Zittoun, a school attorney at [Shipman & Goodwin LLP](#). "An IEP team meeting can go on for two or three hours and, by the end, parents may be tired and overwhelmed," she said. "It's easy to forget what was agreed to in hour one. Having a wrap-up can bring some closure."

Someone on the school-based team should keep track of the proposed actions of the team, Zittoun said, as well as what parent requests the team agreed to or refused to accept. For example, you can say, "The parent requested extended time on tests for the student and the team agreed to include that as an accommodation," she said.

- **Resist making inappropriate promises:** Clarify for parents that the IEP will go into effect after the meeting even if they don't like it, unless they invoke their procedural safeguards or request another meeting to discuss their concerns, Van Heukelem said. "Some parents don't realize that the district is obligated to offer an appropriate program in the time set out by the statute," she said. "If parents don't like a reading goal [for their child with SLD] and don't invoke their procedural safeguards or request a meeting to discuss things, the district has no way of knowing what the parents want." Parents may then become bitter because they feel ignored, Van Heukelem said. "They may think, 'Well, I told you I didn't like it and you did it anyway.' The relationship deteriorates further."

At the same time, don't try to appease parents by offering them something you can't provide, Van Heukelem said. "Too often, I have seen districts tell parents they're not going to put anything into effect that the parents don't agree to," she said. "Ultimately, it's the obligation of the public agency to provide the student with an appropriate program. You don't want the student's rights held hostage to the process. Sometimes you can make things worse by overpromising and underdelivering."

- **Prioritize ongoing communication:** Reassure parents as the IEP meeting winds down that you plan to have ongoing communication with them about their child's IEP, Zittoun said. Initiate the use of a communication book that can go back and forth between the student's parents and his teachers and other service providers so everyone remains on the same page about the child's services and progress. "Sometimes mistrust comes from a lack of communication," she said. "Personal connection, even outside of the IEP meeting, helps to foster trust and good relationships with families."

See also:

- [Seek parents' perspective in threat assessment](#) (Oct. 28)
- [Use 'calculated distraction' to break tension with parent advocate at IEP meeting](#) (Oct. 23)
- [Work it out: Take these steps if parents threaten to file a complaint](#) (Jan. 17)

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