



Anticipating a lot of IEP meetings this fall? Find out how to get organized

While most districts have been conducting virtual IEP meetings during the pandemic, many may not be prepared for the high number of meetings that will likely have to take place in the fall.

Districts are going to have to think now about what will need to be accomplished in the meeting and what additional data will be necessary, said Peter Maher, a school attorney at Shipman & Goodwin LLP in Hartford, Conn. "Make sure parents are part of that discussion and that planning process," he added.

Follow these tips to prevent disagreements and delays regarding IEP meetings in the fall:

- **Watch your language.** Be mindful of the wording you use when you are speaking with parents about setting up future IEP meetings, Maher said. You don't want them to think you are prioritizing students with higher needs or with parents who are more insistent because of the school closures. "We should be planning for all students," he said.
- **Start exploring the primary purpose of each meeting now.** For example, if an IEP meeting is needed for a triennial evaluation, recognize that you can reach out to parents for their input now and see if they would agree to continue the student's current programming or develop an IEP amendment without the IEP meeting, Maher said. "There may be some flexibility to reconvene later after a reevaluation has been completed in the fall," he said.

It may also not make sense to conduct an IEP meeting if you still have to complete some portions of a student's initial evaluation that had been started before the school closures, Maher said. "Some IEP meetings may naturally categorize themselves into which ones are ready to go and which ones can be scheduled after other processes occur," he said. "Categorization of the types of meetings is going to be crucial."

- **Focus on meaningful participation.** It is likely IEP meetings will continue to take place in a virtual setting in the fall because of social distancing guidelines, so working with parents on how meetings will fit into their schedules will be paramount, Maher said. Sending parents documentation that will be reviewed at the IEP meeting ahead of time for their review will also matter more than ever.



Also discuss with parents how certain staff members may not be as available as they had been in the past to participate in meetings if students are still learning remotely or are participating in a hybrid learning model, Maher said. "You may need to discuss when team members can be excused from meetings or can provide written notes ahead of time," he said.

- **Don't wait until the fall.** Whatever you do, don't wait until the fall to start discussing this with parents, Maher said. "The key is to be upfront and communicate on an ongoing basis," he said. "Check in and provide updates and seek input about parents' concerns so they feel that they're included. Hopefully that will encourage some level of trust and patience with parents."

Communicate with the student's parents about the information you have and the information you need, Maher said. "If there's sufficient information to hold a meeting and develop a student's IEP now, then that's worth considering to reduce the backlog for the fall," he said.

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