NATIONAL DOWN SYNDROME CONGRESS

Education Resources

A child with Down syndrome has unique educational needs to be addressed. The efforts of the NDSC, together with the larger disabilities community, have made great strides toward securing quality education for all people with intellectual disabilities. Increasingly, school systems are adopting the processes and utliizing resources to enhance outcomes for their students with Down syndrome, allowing them to succeed alongside their classmates.

As a member of the NDSC, you are at the forefront of securing the rights of children with Down syndrome to receive a proper and effective education. We will not attempt to minimize that challenge but offer content here to help achieve all children with Down syndrome's academic success.

Where do I start when it comes to my child's education?

Evaluations and the information contained in them form the basis for writing a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Present academic achievement levels and related developmental needs help the IEP team decide what the child's educational program should be. Often, parents are dissatisfied with the school district's evaluation and opt to have an independent educational evaluation (IEE) conducted. Other times, parents obtain an independent educational evaluation on their own initiative instead of waiting for and relying upon a school district evaluation.

For more accurate and up-to-date information and resources, visit our website.

www.ndsccenter.org

When is an educational evaluation conducted?

An initial evaluation is conducted upon entering or qualifying for any Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) program. This includes the early intervention program (e.g., infant and toddler program), preschool program (ages 3-5), and school-age program (5-21).

How can I be involved in my child's evaluation?

You will want to select an evaluator who is knowledgeable about your child's disability. Your evaluator should have expertise and knowledge about a variety of tests and should use this expertise to select appropriate tests for your child. You could also contact your local Down syndrome group to get recommendations for independent evaluators from them or other parents. They are usually helpful and are happy to share their experiences. Plan to provide the evaluator with sufficient information about your child – this information will help the evaluator decide which tests to administer. Ask the evaluator what additional information they may need. Taking time to find an independent evaluator who is knowledgeable about your child's disability and that you trust should give you confidence that the evaluator will determine and use appropriate tests for your child. However, you should not assume that your independent evaluator is knowledgeable about all the legal requirements for testing or your state laws.

IEP Explained:

IEP stands for Individualized Education Program. This is a written document that describes the educational program designed to meet a child's individual needs. Every child who receives special education must have an IEP.

The IEP has two general purposes:

- to set reasonable learning goals for a child, and
- to state the services that the school district will provide for the child.

Who is on my child's IEP team?

Everyone involved in developing your child's IEP is important to the process. Those involved will include:

- You, the parents
- At least one general education teacher, if your child is (or will be) participating in the general education environment
- At least one of your child's special education teachers or special education provider
- A representative of the school system qualified to provide or supervise special education provision knows about the general education curriculum and knows what resources the school system has available
- An individual who can interpret the evaluation results and discuss what instruction may be necessary for your child
- Your child, when appropriate
- Other individuals invited by you or the school include someone having knowledge or particular expertise about your child. For example, you may wish to request a relative who is close to your child or a child care provider attend. The school may want a related services provider such as a speech therapist or a physical therapist present. With your consent, the school must also invite representatives from any other agencies that are likely to be responsible for paying for or providing transition services.[i]

You, the parents, play a crucial role because you know your child better than everyone else on the team. You can give insight into the child's strengths and weaknesses. Parents usually understand what their child's needs are when it comes to a complete IEP. Parental involvement is essential as each of the skills that a child is learning in school will also be transferred to the home.

Teachers are essential to the success of the development and the execution of the IEP. General education teachers will explain the regular classroom curriculum and behavioral management. They will also give strategies that they think will be beneficial. The special education teacher contributes experience with working with children with disabilities. They will work with the rest of the team to modify the curriculum as needed to help adjust to how the child best learns.

The role of school representatives will be to emphasize the importance of the child's individualized plan to others and enforce the plan within the school system. This person is usually very knowledgeable about the school system and will ensure that any services set by an IEP are being provided.

What happens during an IEP meeting?

During the IEP meeting, the different members of the IEP team will share their thoughts and suggestions. If this is the first IEP meeting after your child's evaluation, the team may go over the evaluation results, ensuring that your child's strengths and needs are clear. These results will help the team decide what special accommodations your child needs in school.

Remember that you are a vital part of the IEP team. You know your child. Don't be shy about speaking up, even though there may be many people at the meeting. Share what you know about your child and what you would like others to know.

How do I make sure my child's IEP is individualized?

A chart provided by Wrights Law, published by the US Department of Education, will guide you through the necessary steps you and your child's team will need to take to ensure that your child's IEP is individualized. The chart can be found at https://www.wrightslaw.com/info/iep.individ.chklist.pdf

Can I change my child's IEP plan?

You or anyone else can ask to have an IEP revised at any time. You may request a meeting if you disagree with the child's IEP and want to discuss more in-depth your concerns about your child's IEP. If issues arise that the IEP Team can not resolve, a moderator may be brought in to assist.

What are accommodations and modifications?

Federal law states that schools are required to provided accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities to help access an appropriate education program. Accommodations change how a student is taught or assessed. These are a few accommodations that are commonly used in an IEP:

- Allowing extra time to complete an assignment or tests
- Breaking up testing time over several days
- Changing the location of instruction or testing
- Using audiotapes in place of textbooks

Modifications are making changes to the curriculum, what a student is expected to learn or demonstrate.

How does an inclusive setting benefit the students?

Research studies comparing children educated in special schools and self-contained classrooms indicate that it is difficult to provide optimal learning environments in such settings. One particular study conducted in 2000 compared teenagers' achievements of similar ability and family background educated in special schools and mainstream settings. The study showed significant educational benefits for teenagers who had been educated in a mainstream or general education setting with 25-30 hours of additional learning support assistance.[ii] Studies have shown children with Down syndrome who are educated in their mainstream school settings with appropriate supports show significant language gains over time as well as other beneficial factors. It has also been proven to be beneficial to the rest of the students to learn alongside their peers.

What is Assistive Technology?

Assistive Technology (AT) is a term used to refer to tools that benefit all children, including children with Down syndrome and other disabilities. Assistive technology has been defined as anything that makes it easier for a student to turn things on, get dressed, eat, bathe, read, write, get around or move, communicate, and/or play and is intended to improve the functional capability of a student with a disability. Devices may range from low tech devices such as Velcro and pencil grips to highly computerized communication systems.

Congress addressed the rights of children to assistive technology (AT) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and recognized the benefit of technology for students with disabilities to facilitate their access to regular school activities when it added "assistive technology devices and services" to IDEA in 1990. Technology has provided access to employment and community living for adults with disabilities.

How does this apply to children in schools?

School districts are required, under IDEA, to provide AT to students with disabilities if needed as special education, related service or supplementary aid, and/or service needed for a child to benefit from their educational program. Additionally, the 1997 Amendments to IDEA state: "In order to support the inclusion and participation of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms, all IEPs developed for children identified as needing special education services must indicate that AT has been considered to "provide meaningful access to the general curriculum." (IDEA, 1997).

Where can I find more information to advocate for my child?

Center for Parent Information & Resources
Wrights Law

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[i] "Questions Often Asked by Parents about Special Education Services." *Center for Parent Information and Resources*, 3 Apr. 2017, www.parentcenterhub.org/lg1/.

[ii] Hughes. "Inclusive Education for Individuals with Down Syndrome." *Down Syndrome News and Update*, Down Syndrome Education International, 1 Jan. 2006, library.down-syndrome.org/en-us/news-update/06/1/inclusive-education-individuals-down-syndrome/.