



Facilitated IEP Team Meeting Procedures

Georgia Department of Education
Special Education Services and Supports
Family Engagement and Dispute Resolution
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Facilitated IEP Team Meeting Guidelines

IEP Team Meeting Facilitation

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team meeting facilitation is all about the student and helping the IEP Team overcome the pressure and anxiety often associated with a contentious meeting. The IEP facilitator makes sure that the focus of the Team remains on the best interests of the student. The facilitator is a skilled individual who has received specialized training in the area of conflict prevention and resolution through the IEP Team Meeting Facilitation process. IEP Team meeting facilitation is voluntary. Both parties must agree to invite an external facilitator into the IEP Team meeting. The facilitator's primary goal is to assist team members in the thoughtful, productive construction of a quality IEP. This is achieved by encouraging and directing communication specific to the IEP and assuring that the members of the IEP Team are empowered in their participation and invested in the IEP. The facilitator is not a member of the IEP Team and cannot provide legal advice to any Team member. Rather, the facilitator will help the IEP Team create an agenda, ground rules, and desired outcomes, and address issues during the IEP Team meeting that produce tension within the Team so that the Team is able to find their own solutions. The facilitator will also guide the discussions during the IEP Team meeting by asking student-focused questions.

*This is a general description of the IEP Facilitation process. It is not intended to interpret, modify or replace any formal requirements under federal law.

The IEP Team Meeting Facilitator

A trained facilitator:

- Helps members of the IEP Team focus on developing a satisfactory IEP
- Helps create an overall agenda and expected outcomes
- Assists the Team in generating ground rules for the meeting
- Guides the discussion by keeping the Team's energy centered on student-focused questions
- Assists the Team in resolving conflicts and disagreements that may arise during the meeting
- Helps to maintain open communication among all members
- Helps Team members develop and ask clarifying questions
- Helps to keep Team members on task and within the time allotted for the meeting
- Maintains impartiality and does not take sides, place blame, or determine if a particular decision is right or wrong
- Does not impose a decision on the group

The Role of the IEP Facilitator

- To plan and design the meeting process, in partnership with the parties
- To set a positive and welcoming tone for the IEP Team meeting
- To clarify the purpose of the meeting, the ground rules, the desired outcomes, the process to be used, and the roles of each member
- To keep the discussion focused on the student
- To draw out opinions and encourage full participation from all IEP Team members

- To monitor the pace of the meeting
- To maintain neutrality by reflecting content and process back to the Team

Requesting a Facilitated IEP Team Meeting

Parties who can request an facilitated IEP Team meeting are parents, including guardians and surrogate parents, of a child with a disability, an adult student with a disability (18 years or older), and school personnel with the approval of the special education director.

If a parent/guardian or adult student wishes to request a facilitated IEP Team meeting, they must complete the Facilitated IEP Team meeting request form for their district. After completing all of the required information, they must sign the form and provide the form to the district's special education director. Parents/guardian and adult students may provide the request form to the school's lead special education teacher and that person will send the form to the district's special education director. The district's special education director or his/her designee will complete and sign the form.

If the district wishes to request a facilitated IEP Team meeting, the district's special education director or his/her designee must complete and sign the Facilitated IEP Team meeting request for their district. The district must provide the request form to the student's parent/guardian or adult student to complete and sign their portion of the request form.

Completed and signed facilitated IEP Team meeting request forms and a copy of the notice of meeting for the upcoming IEP Team meeting should be mailed or faxed to:

Georgia Department of Education
Division for Special Education Services and Supports
1870 Twin Towers East
205 Jesse Hill Jr. Drive
Atlanta, GA 30334
Attn: Family Engagement and Dispute Resolution Unit
Fax: 404-651-6457

The facilitated IEP Team meeting request form may be obtained from your local Special Education Director*, on your local district's website, or the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) website at <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/IEP-Facilitation.aspx>.

*A list of school districts participating in the GaDOE's IEP Team Meeting Facilitation program is located at <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/IEP-Facilitation.aspx>.

Appropriate Times to Request Facilitation

In most cases, the IEP Team is able to reach determinations regarding identification, evaluation, educational program, placement or the provision of a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities through discussions and consensus decision-making. However, a facilitator may be useful when:

- School personnel want to focus on the concerns and content without also having to be in charge of the meeting process;
- The next IEP Team meeting is expected to be particularly complex or controversial;
- Communication between parents and school personnel is becoming tense; or
- Parents and school personnel are becoming apprehensive about the next IEP Team meeting.

When GaDOE Receives the Request Form

If the GaDOE receives a request form from a parent/guardian or adult student and the form has not been signed by the district, GaDOE staff will contact the district to determine if the district will agree to a third party facilitating the next scheduled IEP Team meeting. If the district agrees, GaDOE staff will appoint a facilitator. Legally, the district is the party responsible for scheduling and conducting IEP Team meetings; therefore, the district must agree to facilitation.

If the GaDOE receives a request form, signed by both parties, but no notice of meeting is included. GaDOE staff will contact the district and ask for documentation of the mutually agreed upon time and place of the next IEP Team meeting for the student listed in the request form. Once appropriate documentation is received, GaDOE staff will create a new case and assign a facilitator. GaDOE staff will contact the facilitator via email and surface mail to inform them of their assigned IEP facilitation.

Once a facilitator has been assigned, GaDOE staff will notify both parties, via email and surface mail, of the name of the facilitator who has been appointed to their next IEP Team meeting. Within two business days of assignment, the facilitator will contact both parties to discuss their issues/concerns, determine the desired outcomes, and develop the agenda based on the input from the parties.

Scheduling a Facilitated IEP Team Meeting

- The request for a facilitated IEP Team meeting must be sent to the GaDOE after the IEP Team meeting is scheduled. The party requesting facilitation must provide reasonable notice by sending the request form and the notice of meeting form (or other documentation of a mutually agreed upon time and place) to the GaDOE Division for Special Education Services and Supports at least 7-10 days prior to the anticipated meeting date.
- Once the date/time is scheduled by the district and the district has submitted the signed Facilitated IEP request form and documentation of the mutually agreed upon time and place, the GaDOE will assign a facilitator.
- The time for Facilitated IEP Team meetings is limited. If a meeting is scheduled and cannot be finalized, the meeting may be reconvened on another day, with or without a facilitator. There may be rare cases when a second session is needed. Prior to scheduling a second session, the facilitator must

contact the GaDOE to explain why a second session is needed and to seek approval. If the parties did not schedule ample time (3 or more hours) for the meeting, a second session will not be approved.

Attendance at a Facilitated IEP Meeting

The required members of the IEP Team (LEA representative, general education teacher, special education teacher/provider, and parent), must attend the meeting unless the LEA and parent have agreed in writing to excuse one or more members. The LEA must follow the federal regulations and state rules regarding excusals. It is recommended that all the required members attend a facilitated IEP Team meeting in its entirety in order to resolve the concerns and/or issues of the Team.

Both parties have the right to invite others to the facilitated IEP Team meeting who have special expertise and/or knowledge about the child. The child should attend when it is appropriate. The child (age 14 and over) must be invited when transition is discussed.

Preparation for a Facilitated IEP Team Meeting

As stated previously, making decisions by consensus can take a long time. One of the most important aspects of a successful facilitated IEP Team meeting is the preparation prior to the meeting. The appointed facilitator will call both parties to gather information, issues/concerns, and desired outcomes from each party.

Both parties should gather all documentation needed for the IEP Team meeting and bring it to the meeting. School staff should bring all forms that will or may be needed. Preparation will help expedite the meeting process.

Preparation prior to the meeting includes, but is not limited to:

- The school sending draft goal sheets to the parent before the meeting;
- The parent sending suggestions for the goal sheets to the school before the meeting;
- The school sending any current evaluation reports to the parent; and
- The parent sending the school any private evaluation reports he or she may have obtained.

As with all IEP Team meetings, the location should provide ample space for the number of adults attending the meeting. IEP facilitators use charts during the meeting and wall space will be needed for the charts.

When the IEP Team Cannot Reach Consensus

When the IEP Team is not making progress toward reaching consensus, then the LEA, which is responsible for the education of the child, must make the decision(s). The LEA representative is charged with making the decision(s) when consensus is not possible. The decision(s) must be documented and the parent must be given prior written notice. The parent or adult student with a disability has two years from receipt of prior written notice to file due process and one year to file a formal complaint.

Documentation During the Facilitated IEP Team Meeting

During many IEP Team meetings, the Team waits until the end of the meeting to complete relevant forms. However, during a facilitated IEP Team meeting, each form should be completed as decisions are made and if signatures are required, signed when completed. Waiting until the end of the meeting to complete all forms is not an effective use of time, lengthens the meeting, and often results in inadvertent errors that lead to noncompliance and/or formal written complaints. At the conclusion for the facilitated IEP Team meeting, the IEP facilitator will retain all chart paper and shred each sheet. The district must ensure that all required information is contained in the student's IEP and that the parent receives a copy of the finalized IEP.

After the Meeting

The GaDOE provides evaluation forms for the IEP Team members to complete and return to the GaDOE. Team members will have the option of: (1) completing a paper evaluation immediately after the facilitated IEP Team meeting and returning the evaluation form to the IEP facilitator; (2) completing the paper evaluation at a later time and mailing the evaluation to the GaDOE in the pre-addressed and pre-stamped envelope given to them by the IEP facilitator; or (3) completing an online evaluation form. The evaluation forms are used for professional development and to improve the IEP Facilitation program. Each participant's time and honest feedback is appreciated.

After the meeting, the IEP facilitator will submit a written or electronic report to the GaDOE regarding the outcome of the meeting, including the major issues that were involved, whether consensus was reached on all, some, or none of the major issues, the level of contentiousness, the relationship dynamics of the IEP Team, the duration of the meeting, and any other pertinent details. The IEP facilitator will also submit to the GaDOE a self-evaluation form and an invoice form. IEP Facilitators may complete an online report and self-evaluation form.