

NYC IEP Meeting Prep Checklist

What to do before, during, and after your child's IEP meeting — in plain language, written by a Columbia-trained graduate clinician.

HOW TO USE

How to use this checklist: Print it. Or open it on your phone. Walk through the boxes before your meeting, and bring it with you. You don't have to do everything on this list — but the more boxes you check, the more prepared you'll feel walking in the door.

SCOPE

This is an educational resource, not legal advice. It is informed by IDEA federal law, the NYC DOE Special Education Standard Operating Procedures Manual, and current best practice. Sources are cited on the back page.

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For: NYC parents preparing for an IEP meeting · **Reading time:** 8 minutes

SECTION 1

Two weeks before the meeting

The single biggest predictor of a productive IEP meeting is what you do in the two weeks before it. Use this time to read, prepare, and write down questions while you have the space to think.

- **Request the evaluation reports in writing.** You have the right to receive evaluation reports before the IEP meeting. Email your child's CSE office at least 2 weeks ahead. Source: NYC DOE SOPM.
- **Read the reports — slowly, twice.** First pass: highlight anything you don't understand. Second pass: look for what is missing or vague.
- **Write down every acronym you don't recognize.** FAPE, LRE, ICT, SETSS, CSE, OHI — even seasoned parents forget these. There's a cheat sheet on page 6 of this PDF.
- **List your child's strengths in your own words.** Bring 3–4 strengths in writing. School teams often jump to deficits; you can refocus the conversation on your child as a whole person.
- **Write your top 3 concerns.** Examples: 'He doesn't make eye contact during reading time,' or 'She's anxious about transitions between classes.' Specific beats general.
- **Confirm who is attending.** Ask the school in writing who will be at the meeting. Required attendees include a general education teacher, a special education teacher, a school psychologist, a district representative, and you. Source: IDEA §300.321.
- **Decide whether to bring someone with you.** You have the right to bring anyone you trust — a co-parent, a family member, an advocate, an interpreter, or a friend who takes good notes.
- **Request an interpreter if needed.** NYC DOE provides interpreters in many languages free of charge. Request at least 1–2 weeks ahead through your CSE office. Source: NYC Public Schools Translation & Interpretation Unit.
- **If the meeting is virtual, test your tech.** Log in 10 minutes early. Have the documents open in another tab so you can scroll along.
- **Block 2 hours after the meeting on your calendar.** IEP meetings often run over. Don't schedule anything tight afterward — you'll want time to decompress and take notes.

REMEMBER

You don't have to sign anything at the meeting. Many parents feel pressured to sign the IEP on the spot. You have the right to take the document home, review it, consult someone you trust, and return your decision in writing. Source: IDEA §300.300, NYC SOPM.

SECTION 2

The day of the meeting

Bring this checklist. Bring the reports you reviewed. Bring water. Take a breath before you walk in — you are an equal member of this team, not a guest.

- **Arrive 5 minutes early.** Use the time to read your concerns and questions one more time.
- **Bring a notebook and the reports.** Take notes on what is said. Quote the language used. If you're recording (legal in NYS with consent), tell the team upfront.
- **Ask for the agenda at the start.** Knowing the order means you can pace yourself. If anything feels rushed, say so.
- **Lead with your child's strengths.** If the team doesn't open with strengths, you can: 'Before we start, I wanted to share what's working for [my child] at home.' This resets the tone.
- **Ask for plain-language explanations.** If a score, term, or acronym confuses you: 'Can you say that in plain words?' You are not interrupting — you are participating.
- **Take notes on specific numbers.** Service hours, group size, frequency, location, who provides each service. These details matter and will be in the IEP document.
- **Pause if you feel rushed.** 'I'd like a few minutes to think about this' is a complete sentence. The team is required to give you time to respond.
- **Ask 'What happens if [my child] doesn't make progress?'** Per *Endrew F. v. Douglas County (2017)*, the IEP must be 'reasonably calculated to enable progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances.' Schools must explain how progress will be monitored.
- **Confirm next steps and timelines in writing.** Who is sending what, by when? Take notes; ask the district representative to send a written summary by email.
- **Don't sign the final IEP at the meeting.** Per IDEA §300.300, you have the right to take it home, review it, and return your decision in writing within a reasonable time.

LEGAL CONTEXT

Endrew F. v. Douglas County (2017) — what it means for you. The Supreme Court ruled that IEPs must be "reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances." Translation: schools must offer ambitious, individualized goals — not just "more than de minimis" minimal progress. If progress feels minimal, the school is required to explain why the IEP is still appropriate.

SECTION 3

Within one week after the meeting

What you do in the days after the meeting matters as much as what you did before it. This is where decisions actually get made.

- **Reread the draft IEP.** Cross-check against your notes. Does what's written match what was agreed in the room?
- **Make a list of anything missing or vague.** Goals without measurable criteria are red flags. Services without specific hours, location, or provider are red flags.
- **Ask follow-up questions in writing (email).** This creates a paper trail. Save every reply in a folder labeled with your child's name and the school year.
- **Consult someone you trust before signing.** Co-parent, family member, advocate, or a plain-language translator (like us). It is normal to take 5–10 business days.
- **If you disagree with the IEP, say so in writing.** You have the right to consent to part of an IEP and not the rest. You can also request mediation or an impartial hearing if disagreements remain. Source: IDEA §300.506–300.511.
- **Sign and return the IEP — or formally request changes.** If you sign, the school must implement services as written. If you don't sign, the district representative will tell you next steps.
- **Save a copy of everything.** Every email, every report, every meeting note. Keep it in a single labeled folder for the school year.
- **Set a 30-day calendar reminder.** Check whether the services in the IEP are actually being delivered. If they aren't, you have the right to follow up in writing.

YOUR RIGHTS

Your due process rights. Under IDEA, you have the right to: be fully informed in your language, participate in decisions, challenge decisions through mediation or an impartial hearing, appeal decisions, and have a parent member at the IEP meeting. These rights cannot be waived. Source: NYS Education Department; NYC Public Schools Your Rights document.

SECTION 4

Questions to bring with you

You don't have to ask all of these. Pick the 5–8 that apply to your child. Writing them down in advance is the difference between feeling prepared and feeling reactive.

About my child's strengths and progress

- What is my child doing well in school right now?
- How will we measure progress on each of these goals?
- How often will I receive progress reports — and in what format?
- What does "meaningful progress" look like for this child specifically?

About services and accommodations

- What services is my child receiving, how often, and for how long?
- Who will deliver each service? Is it push-in (in classroom) or pull-out?
- What classroom accommodations are in place, and how do teachers track them?
- What happens if a service can't be delivered (substitute teacher, snow day, staffing)?

About placement

- Why is this placement being recommended? What was considered and rejected?
- What does the daily schedule look like in this setting?
- How will my child interact with peers in general education?
- If this placement doesn't work, what are the next options?

About my role and rights

- Who is my main point of contact if I have questions during the school year?
- How quickly will the school respond if I email or call?
- What do I do if I think a service isn't being delivered?
- Can I get a copy of all materials in [my preferred language]?

SECTION 5

Acronym cheat sheet

Every IEP meeting throws acronyms at parents. Here are the ones you are most likely to hear, in plain language. Specific to NYC schools where applicable.

IDEA Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The federal law that gives every child with a disability the right to a free, appropriate public education.

FAPE Free Appropriate Public Education. The legal standard your child's IEP must meet.

IEP Individualized Education Program. The legal document outlining your child's services, goals, and supports.

CSE Committee on Special Education. The NYC team that makes eligibility and placement decisions for school-age children (ages 5–21).

CPSE Committee on Preschool Special Education. The NYC team for children ages 3–5.

LRE Least Restrictive Environment. The legal principle that your child should be educated alongside non-disabled peers as much as possible.

ICT Integrated Co-Teaching. A general education classroom with two teachers — one general ed, one special ed.

SETSS Special Education Teacher Support Services. Push-in or pull-out support delivered by a special education teacher.

Related Services Speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, and similar services that support the IEP.

PLOP Present Level of Performance. The section of the IEP describing where your child is right now.

BIP Behavior Intervention Plan. A written plan to address specific behaviors that interfere with learning.

FBA Functional Behavior Assessment. The assessment that informs a BIP — looks at what triggers a behavior and what reinforces it.

12:1:1, 8:1:1, 6:1:1 NYC special class ratios — students per teacher per paraprofessional. Smaller ratios = more individual support.

District 75 NYC's specialized district for students with significant disabilities who need more support than a general education or ICT setting.

Nest / Horizon / AIMS NYC autism programs. Nest = ICT-based, Horizon = self-contained, AIMS = academic, independence, and meaningful support.

PWN Prior Written Notice. The document the school must give you before making changes to your child's services or placement.

WHEN YOU NEED MORE HELP

Walking through your specific documents

This checklist is a great starting point. But every child's IEP and evaluation reads differently — and many parents tell us they don't fully understand what their child's documents say until someone sits down with them and translates the technical pieces.

That's what Understand My Child does. We translate IEPs and school evaluations into plain language, and prepare you for your meeting based on what's in your child's specific documents — not generic advice.

NEXT STEPS

Want to talk? Book a free 15-minute call at calendly.com/understandmychild/30min — no commitment, no documents needed yet, just a quick conversation about whether we can help.

Want to read more? See our full Parent Resource Guide at understand-my-child.com/resources.html

SOURCES & CITATIONS

This checklist draws on

- *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 20 U.S.C. §1400 et seq., particularly §300.300 (parental consent), §300.321 (IEP team composition), §300.506–300.511 (due process)*
- *Andrew F. v. Douglas County School District, 580 U.S. ____ (2017) — establishing the "reasonably calculated to enable progress" FAPE standard*
- *NYC Department of Education Special Education Standard Operating Procedures Manual (SOPM)*
- *NYS Education Department Special Education Procedural Safeguards Notice*
- *NYC Public Schools "Your Rights" guidance document for parents of students with disabilities*
- *NYC DOE Special Education Continuum of Services and District 75 program descriptions*
- *Understood.org: What is and isn't covered under FAPE*
- *Blosser, J., & Means, J. W. (2020). Strategies for working with parents in school speech-language pathology. Plural Publishing.*

About this resource. Prepared by Roshanali Dewji, a graduate clinician in Speech-Language Pathology at Columbia University. Understand My Child is an educational and informational service — not therapy, diagnosis, or legal advocacy. We are not affiliated with Columbia University, the NYC Department of Education, or any school district. This document does not constitute legal advice. © 2026 Understand My Child.