

# Powerful Parent Participation at IEP Meetings

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As a parent you are your child's first teacher. Your role as their teacher does not stop once they enter school. Throughout your child's education, your participation is of the utmost importance. Research shows when schools and families work together, student learning and outcomes improve. Positive changes occur in children's attitudes toward school, their social skills and behavior, and the likelihood that they will take more challenging classes and pass them. This holds true across families of all economic, ethnic/racial, and educational backgrounds—and for students of all ages.

If you are the parent of a student with special needs your participation in their education is supported by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). IDEA states: Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by... strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and ensuring that families...have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home.

As a parent of a child with a disability, IDEA ensures your right to participate in all educational decision making. One of the most significant ways you can participate in your child's education is by attending the annual Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting. This is the meeting that takes place at least once a year, where the main task is to review the progress your child has made toward their goals, as well as plan their goals for the next year and what related services, accommodations or modifications they will need to ensure progress toward those goals.

The annual IEP meeting is a critical part of your child's specialized education. This meeting uses a team approach for sharing information and decision making. This process can sometimes be overwhelming. To help you prepare and hopefully minimize any concerns, consider the following questions prior to attending your child's IEP meeting:

1. What are my child's strengths?
2. What are my concerns about my child's academic, social, personal development?
3. What progress have I seen in my child over the last year?
4. What do I hope and dream for my child? What would I like them to achieve over the next year?
5. What questions do I have about my child's special education program?

You know your child best, therefore you are an essential member of your child's educational team. The team of professionals working to meet the needs of your child needs your expertise and participation. Together families and schools can create a positive experience and bright future for all children.

If you have questions about special education and IEP services in Hutchinson Public Schools please feel free to contact your child's school or Lisa Kraft, Director of Special Services, at 587-2860. To explore this topic further go to [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org) (Minnesota Parent Training and Information Center).