

FAQs on School Advocacy

By Janice S. Cleveland R.N. J.D.

1. I think my child is having difficulty learning in school. What should I do?

Talk to your child's teacher. She may agree with you. Then write a letter to the principal requesting an evaluation and state your reasons for the request. The school should agree to evaluate your child.

2. My child's doctor has mentioned that I can have my child evaluated at a private facility. Is this a good idea?

It is a fine idea but the school district may not pay for it. However, the results of the evaluation will be important to the school district. They will have their specialists review the testing and they may want to repeat some of it. However, if the results of the testing shows a learning disability and teacher observations tend to correlate with the results of the tests, most school districts will accept the results.

3. What type of evaluations are used to test a child or a learning disability?

The evaluator will look at your child as a whole. Your child's health history, vision, hearing, social interactions and behavior will be evaluated in conjunction with various standardized tests. Of course, your child's performance in school and teacher evaluations are important.

4. Is an IQ test necessary?

Yes, even though these tests are very troublesome to the parents, they are necessary to distinguish if the child's difficulties are due to below normal intelligence or a learning disability. However, the law prohibits giving IQ tests to African-American children for eligibility for special education.

5. Couldn't a learning disability decrease a child's score on an IQ test?

Yes, but there are various tests that can distinguish between retardation and a learning disability. Even a child with a severe learning disability can be given an appropriate IQ test that will show his/her intelligence to be in the normal range.

6. My child has been diagnosed with a learning disability. What happens next?

Once a child is found to be eligible for special education, within 30 days an IEP meeting, Individual Education Program, will be held. All significant individuals will attend such as the teacher, speech pathologist, school psychologist and most importantly, the parents.

7. What is an IEP?

Every student who receives special education must have an IEP. The IEP has two purposes. First, it sets reasonable goals for your child and second, it states the services the school district will provide for your child. This will be very specific. For instances, if your child sees a speech pathologist, the times per week and the frequency of each session will be stated. The IEP will also state how much of the school day your child will spend with non-disabled children and if your child will take state wide tests and if so, what modification will be needed.

8. How often do these IEP meetings take place?

There will be an IEP meeting every year with new testing done for the third year meeting.

9. If my child needs to go to a different school during the day for services who transports him/her?

The school district is responsible for all transportation for special education students to and from services. If the IEP team deems it necessary for your child to attend another school other than the home school, the school district will provide transportation.

10. Can my child stay in a regular classroom and still receive special education services?

Absolutely, your child is entitled to the 'least restrictive environment'. This means, to the maximum extent possible, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled. Disabled children are only removed from the regular classroom when the severity of the disability is such that education in a regular classroom cannot be achieved even with aids or modification. Further, a child can spend part of the day in a special education class and take some subjects such as math, science and physical education with non-disabled students.

11. What can I do if I do not agree with the IEP team?

First, do not sign it. Then, be sure to receive a copy of your Procedural Safeguards. You may try to compromise with the IEP team such as try a particular plan or classroom on a short term basis and then have another IEP meeting to discuss the results. If this does not solve the differences, the law does provide a specific process to resolve the differences. These steps are provided in the Procedural Safeguards pamphlet.