

Support for Parents: Navigating Special education and Understanding Available Supports and Resources

Brought to you by The Craig School in collaboration with Keel Services

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7:00 PM

Disclaimer: This presentation is for educational purposes only. No information in this presentation constitutes legal advice.

Presented by [Meghann Bierly](#)

Who is Meghann Bierly?

I am a parent who has been in your shoes and walking this path, too.

- I have a daughter with dyslexia.
- I realized my child was not making growth with her IEP in her public school.
- I began searching for options (there are many and every journey is unique).
- I found The Craig School and her time there changed our lives (que Wicked Soundtrack, “For Good”)



[#OutOfOz: "For Good"](#)
[Performed by Kristin](#)
[Chenoweth and Idina](#)
[Menzel | WICKED the](#)
[Musical](#)

It well may be
That we will never meet again
In this lifetime
So let me say before we part
So much of me
Is made of what I learned from you
You'll be with me
Like a handprint on my heart
And now whatever way our stories end
I know you have re-written mine
By being my friend

The story that led me here...

- **Background** - School Psychologist in PA for over a decade in public schools.
- Move to NJ and became an Independent Contractor while we transitioned
- **Pandemic** - fly on the wall and witness to my child's learning as she struggled academically
- **Realization** -regardless of my professional degrees, certifications, experience, and expertise I lacked the education and understanding of dyslexia.
- **Consumption Mode** -attended every workshop, webinar, and class, joined every parent group and organization...I learned specifically what my daughter was missing and what she needed to be successful.

*I acknowledge the privilege I had in this time, but that is a topic for another webinar

- I started **advocating**, using my experience and expertise of the education system and special education specifically.
- Unfortunately, I came to learn that I needed to **challenge my own beliefs around education** and the system I grew up in, was educated in, worked in, and believed in. This system is struggling and many of our teachers are lacking the understanding and appropriate training to meet our children's needs and effectively teach them to read. .

Advocacy at the local, state, and national level is needed,
but will take time our children don't have.

Our children can't wait!

- Why is this important?

Our teachers and your child's IEP team are not solely responsible for the challenges our children face. Many of them lack the needed professional development and training and this is a systemic problem not a specific teacher problem.

Your priorities are your child(ren), so right now your focus and attention needs to stay on them. Understanding where some of the challenges and issues are may help to maintain your rapport to successfully collaborate with the teams you will be working with as you move forward on this journey.

My child needs help, where do I start?

Identifying the issue is often the first step in any approach to a [solvable](#) problem:

1. [What](#) does our child need to learn, progress, and achieve success aligned to their ability and potential.
2. [Who](#) can provide what your child needs, what training and qualifications of teachers can support students with reading challenges, embracing their learning profiles and meeting their needs so they can learn and grow.
3. [Where](#) can our child access appropriate support and [Where](#) we can find teachers, professionals, experts, and guides with appropriate understanding and knowledge to effectively support our child.
4. [When](#) do we need to intervene? Now! Research shows that early intervention is best, and as you meet other families and experts along the way their stories will reconfirm.

IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.

The IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 8 million (as of school year 2022-23) eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

NJ Department of Education

Parental Rights in Special Education (PRISE, Procedural Safeguards)

New Jersey Administrative code for special education (N.J.A.C. 6A:14) and the federal **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** of 2004 (IDEA 2004) are laws that ensure children with disabilities a free, appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

An important part of these laws provides parents with the right to participate in their children's education. You and representatives of your school district are team members who are responsible for developing an appropriate educational program for your child.

This document will describe the state and federal laws affecting the provision of special education to help you understand your rights in the special education process. With this knowledge, you will be prepared to take an active role in your child's education. This document has been developed for you by the Department of Education, Office of Special Education, in an effort to provide the most comprehensive and up-to-date information. The document is periodically revised to reflect changes in the law, provide additional information that would be of use to you, and to provide the information in a more clear and concise manner.

Resource: [State of New Jersey Department of Education Parental Rights in Special Education](#)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

- Least restrictive environment (LRE) means kids who get special education should be in the same classrooms as other kids as much as possible.
- LRE isn't a place — it's a principle that guides a child's education program.
- The LRE for each child may look different because kids are unique.

Another great resource from www.Understood.org,

[What is least restrictive environment \(LRE\)?](#)

IEP (Individualized Education Program)

SPAN resource: [Overview of Special Education Process in New Jersey Developed by the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network & Map to Inclusive Child Care Team](#)

“ After it is determined that a child is eligible for special education and related services, a meeting is held to develop the child's IEP. The IEP is both a plan and a process. The plan is a written document that describes in detail a child's special education program. The process is the ongoing sharing of information between the family and school district to meet the child's developmental and educational needs. The IEP should describe how the individual child currently performs and the child's specific instructional needs. The IEP must include measurable annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks. When parental consent is granted, the IEP is implemented as soon as possible following the IEP meeting and within 90 calendar days of the school's receipt of parental consent for the first evaluation. For resources on creating meaningful IEPs see [Developing Your Child's IEP](#) at <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/pa12/> “

IEP Team

- Parent
- General Education Teacher *(not less than one, if the child is participating in a general education environment)
- Special Education Teacher*
- LEA (Local Educational Agency) - who is qualified to supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities; is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum; and is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the LEA, and has the authority to commit district resources; In RW this is typically the building principal or the supervisor of special education.
- An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results, who may be a member of the team described above;
- Other individuals, at the discretion of the parent or the agency, who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel as appropriate (ie., speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, teacher for the hearing/visually impaired, outside service providers/specialists/therapists); and
- The Child, whenever appropriate

As outlined in IDEA 2004 [614(d)(1)(B)]

Great Resource for age and eligibility criteria for required team members and meetings: [SPECIAL EDUCATION DECISION MAKING TEAMS | NJ.gov](#)

*Typically this teacher should be a person that knows the child and has worked with the child. However, sometimes with initial IEPs or alternative placements this is not the case. It is idea to have members who know the student and the students needs part of the meeting.

When and how often do IEP meetings occur?

Annually, or more often if necessary, the IEP team will meet to review and revise the IEP and determine placement.

Any IEP team member can request an IEP meeting at any time. You are an equal member of the IEP team and may request a meeting throughout the year at any time.

In addition to the annual IEP meeting, a child must be reevaluated every three years, or sooner if conditions warrant, or if the parent or the child's teacher requests it. Reevaluation is also conducted when a change in eligibility is being considered.

How long is an IEP meeting?

As long as it needs to be!

An IEP meeting is a time to discuss your child's needs and develop effective plans and interventions to meet those needs. You may ask for more time or to reconvene. There are no "have tos" or "must finish todays", the school may not want to be out of compliance, but that's no reason to rush through an IEP.

Example: If you notice that your IEP meetings typically take 2 hours and the team schedules an hour and you feel rushed, it is appropriate to state when receiving the invite that you notice meetings with the team take about 2 hours and you would like enough time to be scheduled for the meeting to complete discussions with the appropriate team members included.

What information is available (or should be) to help the parent and team understand if the program is working and effective and the child is making meaningful progress?

- Current IEP
- Progress reports
- Related services and accommodations
- Report Cards
- Current Work Samples
- Assessments (LinkIT, NJSLA, etc.)
- Communications with Teacher/School/Specialists/Outside Service Providers

It will serve you well to keep as much communication in writing as possible. If there is a discussion in person or over the phone it is good practice to follow up with an email with a summary of the discussion or decisions/plans discussed this provides proof of the discussion as well as a time stamp = legal proof and accountability documented. This illustrates the importance of keeping an organized binder and files as well as a log for communications and will save you time and effort and relieving stress as you prepare for the meeting or if you need to find information during or after the meeting, or in the unfortunate event you need to file for mediation or due process.

Parent has concerns...dig deeper.

Here are areas to ask more questions and request more information be shared with you.

- Child's Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance (School may refer to as the PLAFP)
- Your Parent Concerns
- Relevant Special Factors - Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA), Language Needs, Communication Needs, Instruction in and use of Braille, Needs for Assistive Technology
- Measurable Annual Goals and Benchmarks
- Supports, services, accommodations and adjustments for student and teachers/aides - ie, supplementary aids and services; special skills, knowledge, and professional development; related services - speech, OT, PT, Counseling, transportation, travel training, orientation and mobility training or other; Extended School Year (ESY); Services to help children learn communication skills and strategies; Assistive Technology; Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) and Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP); Services to help child access extra-curricular not academic activities open to students without disabilities before, during, and after school hours, even if child is in a self-contained or out of district placement.
- Transition to Adult Life Plan
- Placement - Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)
- Participation in statewide and district wide tests and needed accommodations
- How progress towards goals will be measured and monitored and how parent will be informed of progress and how often
- Who will be responsible for ensuring that child's services are provided as required by IEP, and for monitoring to ensure that the services are having a desired affect child's progress.

NJ Dyslexia Handbook

The purpose of The New Jersey Dyslexia Handbook: A Guide to Early Literacy Development & Reading Struggles is to provide information to educators, students, families, and community members about dyslexia, early literacy development, and the best practices for identification, instruction, and accommodation of students who have reading difficulties.

[The New Jersey Dyslexia Handbook](#)

State Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) Resources:

- [Overview of Special Education Process in NJ \(English/Spanish\) | SPAN Parent Advocacy Network](#)
- [Developing Your Child's IEP | Center for Parent Information and Resources](#)
- PRE-IEP MEETING LETTER FOR PARENTS TO SEND TO IEP TEAM -This is a document that will outline the areas of the meeting to be covered and discussed in an IEP meeting and the amount of time you may expect to have to discuss each area. This may be helpful in organizing your thoughts and ideas prior to the meeting.
<https://spanadvocacy.org/download/pre-iep-meeting-letter-for-parents-to-send-to-iep-team/?wpdmdl=52859&refresh=659801a3ba4141704460707>
- [Positive Student Profile | SPAN Parent Advocacy Network](#)

These are just a few of the many resources provided by SPAN. Check out the SPAN Library at

[SPAN Resources & Materials](#)

Resources from NJ Department of Education, Office Of Special Education (OSE)

OSE Toolkit Resource Documents [Decision Making throughout the IEP Process](#)

- [Least Restrictive Environment \(LRE\) Decision Making Guide](#)
- [Least Restrictive Environment \(LRE\) Model IEP Form](#)
- [Performance Area Checklist for Parents](#)
- [Present Levels \(PLAAFP\) Checklist](#)
- [Rationale for Removal from General Education Resource Guide](#)
- [Resources for Addressing Student Needs in General Education Settings](#)
- [Resource Tool for Considering Assistive Technology \(RTCAT\)](#)
- [Selection of Supports in General Education Classrooms: Guiding Questions](#)
- [Transition Planning for Students in a Separate Setting](#)

This list of resources can be found at [IEP Development and Resources - Special Education](#)

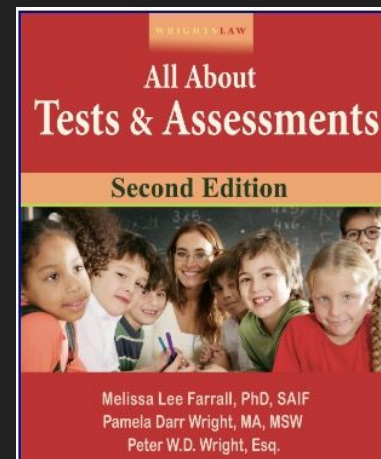
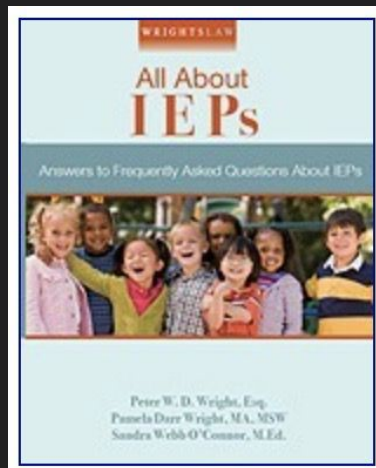
<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/policy/iepdevelopment.shtml>

Resources

Wrightslaw.com – Parents, advocates, teachers, and attorneys come to Wrightslaw for reliable, up-to-date information about special education law and advocacy for children with disabilities.

Books:

- [All About IEPs](#)
- [All About Tests & Assessments](#)



A few key reminders:

- You are an EQUAL member of your child's IEP team.
- You are the EXPERT on your child and your voice at the table is essential.
- You may REQUEST a meeting to address needs and concerns at any time.
- You can formally address any issues through WRITTEN COMMUNICATION and email - decisions are made and can be changed with your request and consent.
- You and your child have RIGHTS in this process - [State of New Jersey Department of Education Parental Rights in Special Education](#)
- You don't have to travel this journey alone...there are MANY RESOURCES - your local SEPAG, SPAN, NJ DOE, Other Parents, Advocates, Attorneys and many other experts and resources available.

Some local groups and resources:

Check your district website or SPAN for your local SEPAG.

State Parents Advocacy Network (SPAN)- <https://spanadvocacy.org/> and [SPAN Resources & Materials](#)

Feel free to friend me and follow me on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) - I use these platforms to share many resources with parents in our community and beyond.

I also have a few other groups on FB:

- [READ 4 NJ](#) (parents, educators, and experts concerned about literacy and many dyslexia advocates in this group).
- [NJ Special Education Parent Community - Resources and Support](#) - this group was started as a request from state leaders and legislators due to the parent networking we have created here in NJ, leaders asked me to poll parents in this space for information from parents to be shared with state leaders. New group with this purpose because I did not want to expose my other groups to this advocacy and policy purpose.
- If you are a leader of a SEPAG let me know and I can share an invite to a networking group.
- If you would like to start a group in your own community, reach out and I will support you in starting a READ 4 _____ (your town/school/district) to support, network, and share resources in your community.

Q & A

Feel free to unmute
or

You can send me a message in the chat/Q&A and I
will answer your question anonymously.

Thank you for join us!

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Connect: [Email](#) / [Facebook](#) / [Instagram](#)

Join Groups: [READ 4 NJ](#) / [NJ Special Education Parent Community - Resources and Support](#)