

## Consideration of IEP Facilitation

To help special education planning teams reach agreements, the Missouri Department of Education provides the option of facilitated IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings. Facilitated IEP meetings is a growing trend that is especially useful when relationships are strained. Parties are encouraged to resolve disputes over the identification, evaluation, educational placement, manifestation determination, interim alternative educational placement, or the provision of a free appropriate public education to a child with a disability through mediation, facilitated team meetings, or other alternative dispute resolution process. All dispute resolution options are voluntary on the part of the parties and must not be used to deny or delay the right to a due process hearing. All dispute resolution processes are provided at no cost to the parent. All federal and state laws and regulations related to the development of IEPs still apply.

### **What is a Facilitated IEP Meeting**

Typically, a member of the IEP team or a school district representative leads the IEP meeting. However, when IEP teams reach an impasse or conflict is expected at the meeting, it may be helpful to have an independent, trained facilitator guide the process. The facilitator is an impartial, trained person provided by the state to work with a student's IEP team. Within certain limits there is no cost for the service to the parents or school district. The facilitator helps keep the IEP team members focused on developing the IEP while addressing conflicts and disagreements that may arise during the meeting. The facilitator will try to create an environment in which the IEP team members listen to one another's points of view and work together to develop an IEP that is acceptable to the parents and the district.

### **Role of the Facilitator**

The facilitator:

- helps members of the IEP team focus on the needs of the child and on developing a mutually acceptable IEP.
- assists the team in resolving conflicts and disagreements related to the IEP.
- helps maintain open communication among all members.
- helps team members by asking clarifying questions.
- helps team members stay 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.

### **Benefits of a Facilitated IEP Meeting**

A facilitated IEP meeting:

- may build and improve relationships among the IEP team members and between parents and schools.
- models effective communication and listening.
- clarifies points of agreement and disagreement.
- provides opportunities for team members to resolve conflicts if they arise.
- encourages parents and professionals to identify new options to address unresolved problems.
- *is* the IEP meeting and does not require a separate IEP meeting to formalize agreements that are reached.

### **Family and District Preparation for a Facilitated IEP Meeting**

- List the child's strengths, needs, and interests and your major concerns about his or her education.
- Consider how the child's disability affects his or her education.
- Think about the child's educational progress. What has been working and what has not?
- Read the child's most recent school Evaluation Report.
- Is the Evaluation Report still an accurate and complete picture of the child?

### **How do I request a facilitated IEP meeting?**

Parents or schools can request a facilitated IEP meeting. However, both parties must agree to use this voluntary process. A request form must be sent to the Missouri Department of Education, Office of Special Education. The forms are available on MoDESE's website, or they will be sent to an interested party by MoDESE.

### **Who attends a facilitated IEP meeting?**

The required members of the IEP team attend the facilitated IEP meeting in addition to the facilitator. If they wish, parents may still bring an advocate or other people who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child.

### **Who is the facilitator?**

The Office of Special Education keeps a list of persons trained and experienced in IEP development and conflict resolution. They are impartial, not representing either the parents or the school district. MoDESE assigns the facilitator or the parties select a facilitator. Facilitators are assigned to regions of the state .

### **Where and when is a facilitated IEP meeting conducted?**

Just as for any IEP meeting, the facilitated IEP meeting is scheduled by the school district and conducted at a time and place mutually agreeable to all required IEP team members, including the parents.

### **Is there any type of procedural notice that I will receive regarding a facilitated IEP meeting?**

The district is still required to give proper notice of the IEP meeting to the parents about the purpose, time, and location. The notice will identify the facilitator.

### **What happens if we don't finish the IEP?**

A facilitated IEP meeting may take longer than a typical IEP meeting, but it is recommended that it not last more than four hours. If an agreement about the IEP is not reached at the first meeting, another meeting may be scheduled. Districts pay the facilitator if there is a second facilitated meeting of the same parties.

### **Does the facilitator make decisions?**

No. The role of the facilitator is to facilitate communication among the IEP team members, helping them to develop an effective IEP for the student. The facilitator models effective communication skills and offers ways to address and resolve conflicts in the development of the IEP. Facilitators are trained in effective communication and ways to address and resolve conflicts. The members of the IEP team are the decision-makers. Parents still have 14 calendar days to sign the "Notice of District's Proposed Action or Denial."