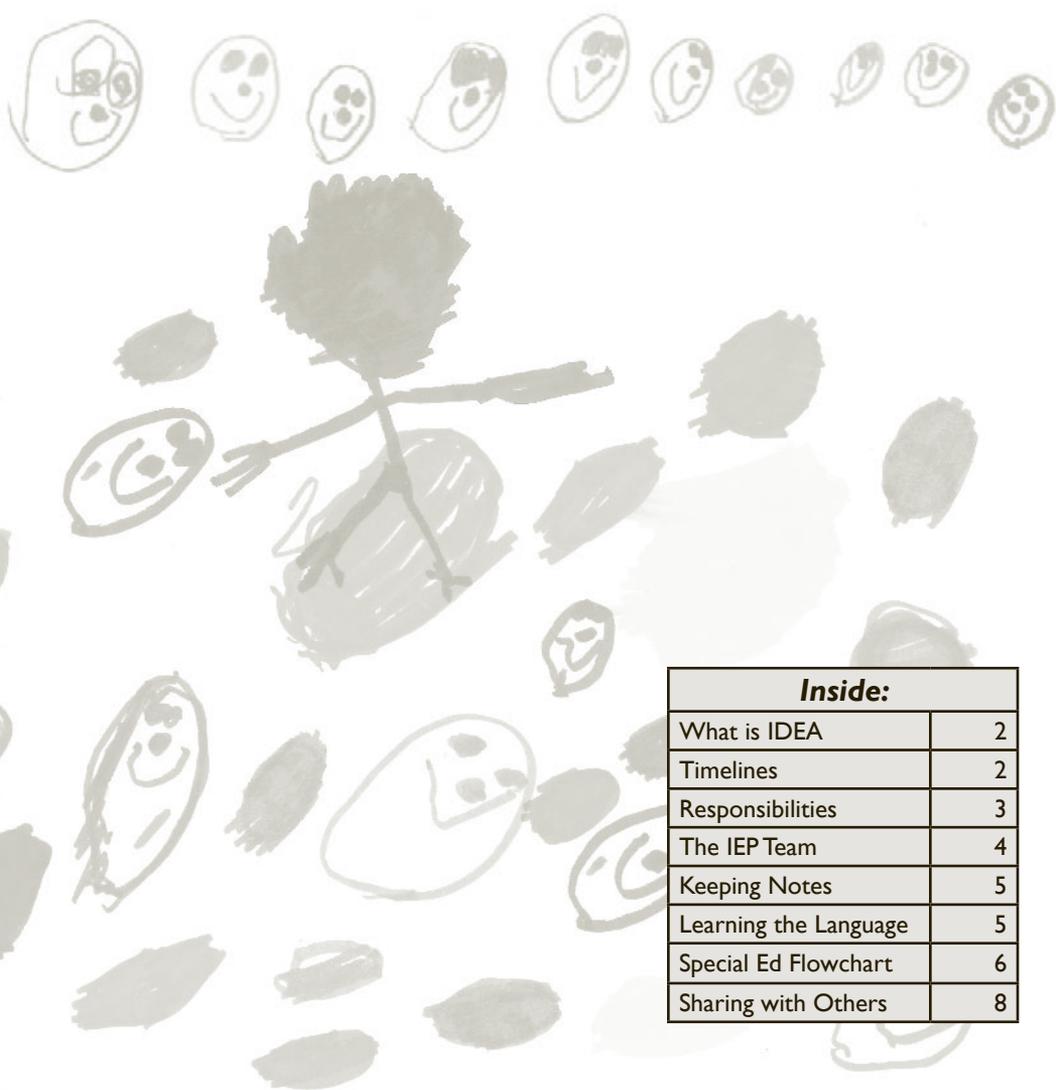


Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education

Welcome to Special Education in Alaska



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Artwork by Brooke Messerschmidt from Tok, Alaska

WELCOME TO SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN ALASKA

Welcome to the world of Special Education and Related Services! Parents who have been in your shoes say that locating information and services their child requires can be confusing and time consuming. It's difficult to figure out where, exactly, to begin, so we'll share with you some things we've learned and then provide you with additional resources in the form of phone numbers and organizations that you can contact to get linked with other parents who have navigated this and other systems before you.



IDEA - INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT



The federal law for the education of students with disabilities is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA explains how students with disabilities will receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE). IDEA recognizes the importance of a parent's knowledge of their child's needs to assist in creating an education plan for their child. Parents and schools must work in partnership to determine the child's needs, develop a written plan to address those needs, and provide the supports and services identified in the plan at no cost to the parent. This document is called an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

IMPORTANT TIMELINES

If you feel your child has a disability that is effecting his education you should request, in writing, an evaluation for special education. Once you, the parent, have signed a consent form to request the evaluation the school district has 45 school days to evaluate your child, develop an IEP if your child is determined eligible and begin providing services. If your child is determined eligible for special education services, the school district has 30 calendar days within this 45 school day timeline to develop and implement your child's IEP.



WHO DETERMINES ELIGIBILITY?



The determination of eligibility is made by a team of qualified professionals and the parent. If a school decides your child is not eligible, they must give you written notice regarding the eligibility determination and information on your rights if you disagree with their decision.

LEARN ABOUT IDEA - YOUR RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

National organizations that can guide you are:

- The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (www.NICHCY.org)
- The Learning Disabilities Association of America (www.ldanatl.org)
- Pam & Pete Wright's Special Education Advocacy (www.wrightslaw.com)

Alaskan information resources:

- Alaska Department of Education & Early Development • (907) 465-2800 (www.eed.state.ak.us)
- Disability Law Center of Alaska
1-800-478-1234 • (www.dlcak.org)
- Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education
1-888-269-8990 • (www.hss.state.ak.us/gcdse)



- Stone Soup Group
(Parent Training & Information Ctr)
(907) 561-3701 • (www.stonesoupgroup.org/)
- Your school district's Special Education Department Subscribe to AKSPED listserve—go to <http://list.state.ak.us/guest/RemoteListSummary/AKSPED>

BE A CENTRAL PART OF YOUR CHILD'S INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP) TEAM

The IEP team is critical to the success of your child's education. Be central to the team. There are things that only you know about your child. The team must include the following people:



- The parent (or legal guardian) or surrogate guardian
- The child (if appropriate)
- The Special Education teacher
- The Regular Education teacher
- A school District Representative who can commit to school district resources
- Evaluators and therapists (as appropriate)
- Other professionals or individuals invited by the parents or the district, who may be helpful in developing an appropriate IEP.

BE PERSISTENT

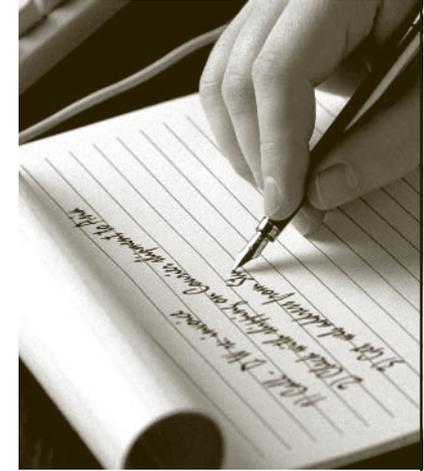
It's fine to ask lots of questions, because this is your child. Here's what we advise:

- Keep calling... keep asking questions (there are no unimportant questions)
- Ask everyone you talk with for names and telephone numbers of other people you can contact
- If you get a recorded voicemail, stick with it. Staying on the telephone line will often get you connected with a real person
- Written requests and/or email sometimes result in better and timelier responses



TAKE AND KEEP NOTES

It's important to get organized. When you call the school or agency, write down the date and time of the call, who you talk with and what the conversation is about. You may need that information at some point and you'll need to remember the important points. Keep track of: the person's name, their phone number, dates of IEP meetings, who agrees to what. It's important to keep good notes and keep a copy of all paperwork in a file folder, including letters, reports and consent forms. Using a binder system or other document holder is helpful. You can audio tape the IEP meetings to help you remember later what was discussed.



EDUCATE YOURSELF

As a parent, you need to educate yourself. You need to learn all you can about your child's disability and interventions that are available to help your child succeed. Check with your doctors, related services providers and the Internet for articles. Call your local library or the Alaska Health Sciences Library at 1-888-997-7878. The Special Education Handbook is a practical guide for educators. Parents can also use it as a ready reference, too. Stone Soup Group can help you too. (907) 561-3701 or (877) 786-7327

LEARN THE LANGUAGE

Use the "Initials Used in Special Education" in this booklet to familiarize yourself with the "right language." Listen carefully to the words and abbreviations people in the education system use.



- Ask about abbreviations or initials you don't understand
- Write the words or abbreviations down
- Practice using these words and/or abbreviations in your conversations (FAPE, IEP, LRE)

LOOK TO OTHER PARENTS

Your greatest resource is other parents of children with a disability and the team that you're a part of at school. Connecting with other parents can give you energy. Parents recommend that you:

- Find a support group near you
- Ask your child's health providers, teachers or others if they can connect you with other families or if there is a Parent Resource or support group you can connect with.
- LINKS is in the Mat-Su Valley (907) 373-3632
- Access the Anchorage School District's STeP Center (907) 742-3872
- Stone Soup Group provides training and support (907) 561-3701 or (877) 786-7327 (www.stonesoupgroup.org/)

SHARE WHAT YOU LEARN

You will become familiar with evaluations, IEPs, PLEP, Goals and Objectives, Transitions and other aspects of Special Education. Others can benefit from your knowledge and the expertise that you will gain about your child's specific condition.

- Tell the people you contact how they've helped you
- Call back if you discover a great resource they don't know about
- Pass on to other parents what's been successful and what you've learned

OTHER WAYS TO GET INVOLVED



- Get involved with your local school board
- Be involved in your school and your district
- Support your children's teachers and aides
- Join your local Parent Teacher Association
- Start a group for parents interested in learning disabilities or other specific topics
- Establish or join a local Special Education Advisory Council

INITIALS USED IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

DVR	Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
ICC	Interagency Coordinating Council
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IEE	Independent Education Evaluation
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MR	Mental Retardation
OHI	Other Health Impaired
OT	Occupational Therapist
PLEP	Present Level of Educational Performance
PT	Physical Therapy
SESA	Special Education Service Agency



OTHER PUBLICATIONS ON SPECIAL EDUCATION IN ALASKA

- **Special Education and the Law.** Available through the Disability Law Center of Alaska 1-800-478-1234 (www.dlcak.org)
- **Alaska Parent Guide:** Education and the Exceptional Child (in several languages) (www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/sped/Resources/ParentInformation.html)
- **Special Education Handbook.** Department of Education & Early Development. (www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/sped/Handbook02/contents.html)
- **Where to Turn.** Published by the Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education. (www.hss.state.ak.us/gcdse)



