

## ***An Overview of the Special Education Process***

*Dr. Ed Steinberg, Assistant Commissioner, CDE*

*Along with the rights that parents of children with disabilities have, I believe, there are responsibilities associated with that. The primary responsibility, I believe, is that parents need to be as knowledgeable and as informed about the special education process. I believe parents of students with disabilities need to be particularly informed about the IEP process which again serves as the foundation for everything that follows. We hear a lot these days about the need for parent involvement, parent engagement in education which is critically important.*

**Intro.** A meaningful education is important for all children. Sometimes, however, children may have needs that require special supports. Sometimes these needs are obvious right from the start; and sometimes they don't appear until a child is in school. Some children have trouble learning to read or write. Others have a hard time remembering new information. Still others may have challenges with their behavior, seeing, hearing, speaking, and/or moving their bodies. For some children, growing up can be very hard to do!

*Brad and Laura Ayres, Parents*

*B: Christopher is a 13 year old, is very happy at home – um – loves to play, loves to giggle, loves to*

*L: watch movies*

*B: watch movies. Christopher uses sign language. Sign language that he invents on his own sometimes and we have to figure out what it is. That can be rather difficult. Most children with Fragile X syndrome can talk. Christopher cannot.*

*L: So he's nonverbal. He also, with that disability has ADHD, anxiety, impulse control, behavior issues.*

*Guadalupe Caballero, Parent*

*Well, Francisco, he's unpredictable – he's a 10 year old. I believe in 2004 he was diagnosed with moderate autism. It's very difficult. His behavior varies a lot. Sometimes when we want to establish our routine, he changes. His behavior goes up and down all the time and it's difficult for him and for the whole family.*

When a child is having difficulties in school, it's important to find out why. The child may have an educational disability. By law, schools must provide special help to children with educational disabilities. This help is called special education and related services. Special

education is specialized instruction, designed to meet the individual needs of the child. The term, related services, refers to those services that enable the child to access and benefit from the specialized instruction, and includes such services as occupational therapy and physical therapy.

*Laura and Brad Ayres, Parents*

*L: We knew about the IEP process - as teachers and had sat at the table with families and then when we started with Christopher found... I found myself thinking wow now we're on the other side fo the table and*

*B: That was really hard*

*L: It was very sobering*

*B: Especially not knowing half the people that were sitting across the table from us*

*Barb Goldsby, Parent and Supervisory, Secondary Transition Services, CDE*

*Parents can be quite overwhelmed when they find out that their child has a disability or when they find out that their child has special needs and is receiving special ed services – well what does that mean? It can be – because it's so heavy in law and regulations - it can just be overwhelming*

There's a lot to know about the special education process.

This video is an excellent place to start. It is designed to help parents of children age 3 to age 21 understand and participate in the evaluation process for special education eligibility as well as in the development and implementation of the Individualized Education Program, or IEP for short. It provides suggestions, tips, and information. Our goal is to provide parents with the tools they need to understand and partner with the school in the IEP process.

*Dr. Ed Steinberg, Assistant Commissioner, CDE*

*with our work of educating students with disabilities we begin with a basic premise that parents know more about their child than anyone else involved in the educational process and we believe that parents need to have a strong and loud voice - but to have that strong and loud voice be heard I believe parents need to be again as informed and as knowledgeable as possible about the IEP process*

*Jim and Veronica Brennan, Parents*

*J: You have to be the person that goes out there and does your research, does your homework, talks to people and tries to understand the system as best you can*

*V: and as a partner that's exactly what you're doing. If you're partnering you have to do your share as well*

*J: Yeah because it's not just about your rights as a parent, you also have responsibilities*

It is important to understand that the IEP Process is legally driven and based on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, commonly referred to as IDEA. IDEA is the federal law that regulates special education services for children with disabilities.

**Child Find.** IDEA requires that children with disabilities from birth to age 21 are located, evaluated and identified. When a child is suspected of having a disability, the child may be referred for a full evaluation by the parent or by the school. If the parent is making the referral, it is best to put the request for evaluation in writing. When a child is referred, the school will give the parent a copy of the procedural safeguards. Procedural Safeguards describe the rights of the parent and child.

The District's staff will contact the parent to develop an evaluation plan. The purpose of the evaluation is to see if the child has an educational disability and is eligible for special education services. The evaluation is intended to answer these questions:

- Does the student have a disability that requires the provision of special education and related services?
- What are the student's specific educational needs?
- What special education services and related services are appropriate for addressing those needs?

The evaluation must be focused on the child, and assess the student in all areas related to the student's suspected educational disability. If a child had failed a hearing or vision screening, the evaluation would include results of audiograms or eye reports.

An evaluation plan will be developed by a multidisciplinary team that includes a group of qualified professionals, and the parent.

*Laura Writebol, Education Liaison, Denver Human Services*

*Foster parents in my experience want what's best for a child or youth who is placed in their home and so a lot of times they will go ahead and initiate a special ed referral with the school and will want to go ahead and sign permission and get the process started but they do that without realizing that we still need to include the biological parents or biological family when appropriate in the process*

The team will review existing evaluation data and also look at the special education eligibility criteria for the area of suspected disability to decide whether additional evaluation information is needed.

If the team decides that no further information is needed, a written notice will document the team's decision. The written notice will summarize: what the team decided to do and why; the information that was used to make this recommendation; and any other factors considered in making the decision. A parent may request further evaluation at this point. If the parent agrees that no further information is necessary, a summary of the existing data will be written and the team will move into an eligibility determination process.

If more information is needed, written consent to evaluate must be obtained from the parent. Generally, initial evaluations must be completed *within 60 calendar days* from the date the school receives the written consent of the parent.

It is important to know that consent is voluntary – meaning that the parent can refuse to give permission. Consent can also be revoked at any time which means that a parent may change his or her mind and withdraw permission. Revoked consent is not retroactive so it will not negate any action that may have occurred between giving consent and revoking it.

*Fran Herbert, Principal Consultant, CDE*

*Parents have to advocate. Parents have to ask questions – but you know what? We as educators need to provide them with that opportunity to advocate.*

***Determination of Eligibility.*** The multidisciplinary team, including the parent, looks at the student's evaluation results. The results will be compiled into an evaluation report that summarizes the findings. The evaluation report must be provided to the parent.

*Alicia Ornelas, Parent*

*I was very scared. I was depressed. I had no idea what was going to happen, actually - but everyone there that was present – they were very understanding and they were very friendly, including the interpreter. At the time when they gave me some kind of information that they placed in front of me, I broke down – and they supported me at that time. They really helped me then. They gave me a pat on the back and they said your daughter will be fine - And something that I will never forget happened...*

*My daughter's teacher, who did not know me and she did not know my child either, she was crying – she was crying with me. Then I realized my daughter was going to be fine because she cared about my daughter.*

Together, the team decides if the student is a "child with an educational disability," according to special education law. The team looks at the state's eligibility criteria to make the determination. If the student is eligible for special education, before services can be provided, the parent must give written consent.

*Jon Paul Burden, Director of Exceptional Student Services, Weld RE-4 School District*

*The worst thing I think a parent can do is nod and say okay okay and have a thousand questions and never ask them so I think their responsibility in the meeting is to slow it down when it feels too fast, ask questions when they don't understand, and know that it'll take as long as it takes until that determination is made and if that meeting means that they need to reschedule because they haven't come to a determination they need not feel pressured and they need to know they have the rights to do that*

The written consent is a general consent that opens the door to services for the student.

The actual services will be agreed upon during the next process – developing an

Individualized Education Program or IEP.

*Robin Stranahan, Principal*

*An IEP does not mean anything other than we are differentiating the program for your child because that's how they learn*

*Gretchen Holland, Parent*

*Things that we go through in the IEP process are things that all parents worry about for their kids. It's not that we're facing challenges that others can't understand, it's just we're facing it a little more magnified because we need a little extra help to make sure it happens*

**The IEP Team.** The IEP Team may be the same as the multidisciplinary team, or it may vary slightly. The parent is a full participating member of both teams.

*Jim and Veronica Holland, Parents*

*J: You are an equal member of that team and everybody has their area of expertise and your area of expertise is your child*

*Jon Paul Burden, Director of Exceptional Student Services, Weld RE-4 School District*

*What parents know is multitudes more about their children than teachers ever will. That is the strongest tool they have and the strongest - you know - piece of information they can bring to the IEP process*

If a student is age 15 or older, she must be invited to be a team member.

*Paul Holland, Parent*

*It really is Emily's IEP meeting, not Paul and Gretchen's. And so she's been attending for the last 3 to 4 years and this was really the first year where she wanted to take an active role and again had a phenomenal moderate needs teacher that helped her do the invitations and pass them out and organize it. She was really excited about her meeting which I think is the way it should be*

*Beau Goldsby, Former Student*

*I was nervous at first. I really was because I didn't know what I was getting into and then after that IEP meeting, it just got better and better, you know?*

Additionally, at least 1 general education teacher; 1 special educator; and, the special education director (or designee) who can make decisions about resource allocation must be on the team. One of the members of the team must be able to interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results. Often there will be additional team members such as a speech language pathologist, school psychologist, social worker, occupational therapist, or physical therapist. There may be a teacher who is certified in deafness or visual impairments, if needed.

*Alicia Ornelas, Parent*

*Even though I understand some English, I always want an interpreter at the meetings because I want to make sure that everything that I say is very clear and that everything that I receive is also very clear. I don't want any misunderstandings*

The school will schedule and conduct an IEP meeting. Staff must:

- contact the participants, including the parent;
- notify the parent early enough to make sure he has an opportunity to attend;
- schedule the meeting at a time and place agreeable to the parent and the school;
- tell the parent what the purpose, time, and location of the meeting are; and
- tell the parent who will be attending.

*Elizabeth Schlomer, Parent*

*The first emotion that I felt at the IEP meeting was I have no clue what I'm doin. I know I should be doing something but I don't know what that is.*

*Yvette Plummer, Executive Director, Denver Metro Community Parent Resource Center*

*The best way a parent can participate at an IEP meeting is be honest – respectful, honest and firm.*

The parent or student may choose to invite to the IEP meeting others who have knowledge or special expertise about the child. While the parent is not required to notify the school that he or she is inviting someone to attend the IEP meeting, it is a courtesy to do so.

*Laura and Brad Ayres, Parents*

*L: We have Christopher's godmother come and she just sits there and takes notes and really doesn't have anything to say but it really relieves the pressure off of us being that we're emotionally involved in trying to think and speak and say the right things and be appropriate and just to have those notes when you leave is invaluable.*

*Mandi Bauer, Parent*

*Andrew's last IEP meeting he was there so he sat between us and the 3 of us led it*

*Andrew Bauer, Student*

*I go there and listen to them talk about my IEP and I tell them what I've been doing*

*Amanda LePage, Special Education Teacher & Counselor*

*We would like to have more students run their own IEP meetings. Last year I did have a student that ran his entire IEP meeting and it was a pretty amazing experience for him.*

If the student is age 15 or older, but not later than the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, the school may ask permission to invite other public agency representatives who may support the student in transition to adult life.

## ***The IEP.***

*Dr. Ed Steinberg, Assistant Commissioner, CDE*

*Over the years the shift – there’s been a significant shift in the IEP process that has gone from access to education now towards meaningful outcomes for students with disabilities. Are we graduating students with disabilities? Are we preventing drop-outs? Are we graduating students with disabilities who are prepared for the world of work or to access higher education – and for those reasons the regulations and the content of the IEP process changes considerably over time. We’re looking at the same academic and social benefits of education for students with disabilities as we do with every other student in the system.*

During the development of the IEP, the IEP team focuses on the individual needs of the student, discusses priorities for the year, and talks about what services and supports are needed for the student to receive educational benefit. The IEP is a written document that reflects the decisions and discussions of the IEP Team.

*Adam Bauer, Parent*

*I would recommend that the parents try to get a copy of the IEP a couple of days ahead of time*

*Jim and Veronica Brennan, Parents*

*J: it’s something you can look at and say – these are what his needs are, these are what his goals are, these are what his strengths are – and have a plan written down that’s accountable and something that you can measure*

The IEP document must include the following:

*The present levels of academic achievement and functional performance. The “present levels” statement comprehensively describes a child’s abilities, performance, strengths, and needs. It is based on, and arises out of, the information and data previously collected and known about the child.*

*Gretchen and Paul Holland, Parents*

*G: I believe an IEP meeting should be a collaboration of what’s working really well, what strengths kids have, and then to look at where do we want the child to go in the next year and how do we use those strengths to make that possible*



The present levels describe:

- the child's strengths and needs,
- what helps the child learn,
- what limits or interferes with the child's learning,
- information from current evaluations of the child, and
- how the child's disability affects his or her ability to be involved and progress in the general curriculum.

The "present levels" statement is the foundation upon which the rest of the IEP is built.

*Robin Stranahan, Principal*

*We all want to know what the great things are about our child. We want to know that the adults in the room recognize and understand that before we can listen to what may not be working well*

The IEP should also document the IEP team's considerations of special factors including:

- Behavior that may require the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports or a behavior intervention plan
- In the case of a student who has limited English proficiency, the student's language needs
- The communication needs of the child, and in the case of a student who is deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind, a Communication Plan explaining how the communication needs of the student will be met
- Whether the student needs assistive technology services and/or devices, such as access to a word processor or an augmentative communication device
- In the case of a student who is blind, visually impaired or deafblind, a Learning Media Plan explaining how the student will access learning and literacy instruction and materials

If the child is age 15, but not later than the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, the IEP team must develop measurable goals for the student that are focused on what the student will do after high school.

*Barb Goldsby, Parent and Supervisory, Secondary Transition Services, CDE*

*The IEP is about the student so the student has to be involved. The student needs to be involved from the very beginning as far as being able to identify what their strengths are, what their needs are, what their goals and their dreams are.*

The IEP must identify the transition services needed to help the student reach those goals. These services are intended to help youth with disabilities shift from high school to the world of adulthood.

*Beau Goldsby, Former Student*

*I've learned to do many things. I mean - school will really help you if you want to learn something. You just go and do it and it's like wow I did something today and I learned how to do it and it was amazing*

Measurable annual goals are a key component of the IEP. Annual goals are like a road map. Where is the child heading this year? The team should consider

- What can the student currently do?
- What challenging, yet attainable, goals can we expect the student to meet over the next year?
- How will we know that the student has reached the goals?

Writing annual goals involves considering each area of the child's needs related to the general curriculum, nonacademic and/or extracurricular activities, and any other educational needs that result from the child's disability.

Another aspect of writing annual goals is contained in the word "annual." What can the child expect to achieve in a year? A well-written goal must describe the skill or level of performance that the child is expected to reach within a year.

And there's something else that's very important. How will you measure whether the child has achieved the goal? The IEP team must be able to tell if the goal has been reached, so the child's performance must be able to be seen, heard, counted or somehow measured. The IEP will describe how, when and how often the school will provide information to the parent about the child's progress toward meeting the goals.

*Elizabeth Schlomer, Parent*

*The involvement really is huge and then what you're doing at home runs parallel to that and that's the key – is if everybody's on the same page no matter what you're doing that just helps the child progress that much more*

*Reid Auger, Language Arts Teacher*

*I've had parents who you know are constantly involved on a level of keep me posted of what I can do to help. Certainly, that's the kind of relationship that you want to build with the parents – one where they're feeling like they're a part of it and so when we can tell them hey here's what we're working on in class so if you can reinforce this at home that will be real helpful and so - that works*

Another important component of the IEP is the identification of accommodations and modifications. *An accommodation is a strategy that helps the student access learning materials.*

*Yoko Kodaira, School Psychologist*

*The student is still working towards the same curricular objectives that anyone else in school is working on at their – but based on their own individual needs*

For example, allowing a student who is unable to write to give his answers orally or to use a computer is an accommodation. This student is still expected to know the same material and answer the same questions the same as the other students, but he doesn't have to physically write his answers to show that he knows the information. Other examples of accommodations include the use of an augmentative communication system or a sign language interpreter, books in Braille, extended time on assignments or tests, having directions read, or using math manipulatives.

In addition to identifying accommodations for daily use in the classroom, the IEP Team must identify accommodations needed for state and district assessments. Some children may not need accommodations. Many *will* need accommodations.

*Andrew Bauer, Student*

*If I can't figure out the problem and I'm totally lost I would go tell the teacher or tell the teacher to reread the instructions, the directions - and that's it. If it was CSAP then I would just have to figure it out on my own because I can't ask for help on CSAP*

It's important for IEP Teams to know what assessment accommodations the state permits.

Modifications change what a student is expected to learn when participating in the general curriculum. Modifications may change the instructional level, the content, and/or the performance criteria. With a modified program, the student may work on the same subject area as the rest of the class. Because some students have significant academic needs, the IEP Team may need to prioritize and focus on some of the academic standards.

*Reid Auger, Language Arts Teacher*

*I tell my students you can do this work and I hold them to a high standard and we build that rapport and within doing that kids'll go to the mat for you*

*Andrew Bauer, Student*

*At school, her name is Ms. Bea, she's my teacher and she helps me with some of my things but she encourages me to do some independent things too*

The IEP team must also consider whether a student needs to receive services beyond the typical school year in order to ***maintain*** current performance levels on skills. This is called Extended School Year or ESY services. The purpose of ESY services is to help students ***maintain*** their current skills, not to acquire new learning or skills. Some children receiving special education services may be eligible for ESY services. Schools need to consider: whether the student experienced significant regression on IEP goals during breaks from school; if it took an unreasonably long period of time to relearn previously learned skills; and, if there are any predictive factors relevant to determining a need for ESY services. Whether a student needs ESY is a decision that is made by the IEP team.

An important part of the IEP is the section that explains service delivery.

This is where the details about the student's services are described.

*Reid Auger, Language Arts Teacher*

*I think one of the most important parts about the general ed role as a teacher is the constant communication that goes on with the special ed teacher. In our situation at my school luckily I have – we're able to have the special ed teacher team teach with me one class period a day and so that's really important in terms of me learning what the kids are doing, where I can help out, where I can actually jump in and take a kid to another level*

Services should be specifically designed to support the child in achieving annual goals.

It is important to remember that the education, services, and supports outlined in a child's IEP do not necessarily cover that child's *entire* education. The IEP only addresses the child's **special** educational needs. If a child needs special education support throughout the school day and for all activities, the IEP will cover all these needs. If the child doesn't need special education support in one or more areas (for example, physical education, music, math or science), then the IEP will not include these subjects. The child accesses those subjects through the general curriculum, with no additional special education services.

Special education services must be provided in the "least restrictive environment" or LRE. Generally, this means that the child would be educated in the regular classroom with his peers without disabilities and in the neighborhood school unless the IEP Team decides otherwise.

*Elizabeth Schlomer, Parent*

*Abigail is in a regular kindergarten class with an IEP and extra assistance and Wyatt is in a specialized autism class*

The LRE decision involves an analysis of multiple factors, including the nature and extent of the student's disability and a consideration of the child's participation in extracurricular activities.

In order to accommodate the varying needs of students with disabilities, including the LRE, a continuum of alternative placements must be available to meet student needs. This means that special education services are provided in a variety of settings such as: the public school; in the home; in hospitals and institutions; and in other settings such as

approved facility schools. The special education director has the final authority to decide the exact location where the student's services will be provided --such as a particular classroom or school. However, the location chosen must be consistent with the IEP Team's decisions about the service delivery and the LRE for the student.

*Barb Goldsby, Parent and Supervisory, Secondary Transition Services, CDE  
Beau really needed some individualized instruction in reading and in math and so, for Beau, it made sense to have him receive those services in a special ed classroom. The social piece was also huge for Beau. Beau is an extremely social guy and we knew that it was extremely important for him to be involved in the general ed milieu as much as possible*

Following the IEP Meeting, the parent will receive a written explanation of the IEP. This written explanation is called Prior Written Notice.

The school must provide the parent with Prior Written Notice. The Prior Written Notice provides a clear record for the student, parent, and school of the decisions that have been made; the reasons and bases for those decisions; and the actions that will or will not be taken. This is given to the parent *prior* to the IEP being put into action. This allows the parent to go home, think about the decisions, and ask follow up questions. If, after a reasonable amount of time as determined by local policy, the parent has not contacted the school with concerns, the IEP will be implemented.

***After the IEP Meeting.*** The student's IEP must be carried out as written. The parent is given a copy of the IEP. Each of the student's teachers and service providers has access to the IEP and knows his or her specific responsibilities for carrying out the IEP. This includes the accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided to the child.

*Yoko Kodaira, School Psychologist  
Some times when discussing issues around a student's educational disability, I think that can be an emotional process and I think that it can be a challenging process and I think that keeping lines of communication open between home and school is always going to lead to more successful outcomes for a student.*

*Veronica Brennan, Parent*

*Keep the open communication going with all the team members – and find out what the best source is for them to keep that open communication whether or not it's face-to-face, whether or not it's email, whether or not it's a quick phone call saying hey I just want to update you real quick – this is going on – whatever that mode of communication is - to keep that open dialogue*

*Alicia Ornelas, Parent*

*Something else that has helped me is connecting with other families that are going through the same thing that I'm going through – just sharing with them my experiences, the knowledge that I have, and also receiving from them their own experiences and their knowledge*

*Elizabeth Schlomer, Parent*

*It's nice to be associated with other parents who are going through the same things we are, who have the same concerns that we have, and you know all of us are on the same page as we want what's best for our child*

*Melanie Lawhorn, Parent*

*I feel that I've made connections in the school district with the special education department. I get information from different schools from different teachers that truly tell me where to go. I just was given a name that I need to contact so my daughter can learn how to be a volunteer and she can help kids cause that's where she wants to be one day. She wants to help kids and this is a volunteer situation that I can get her involved and that was given to me through the school district – and that's amazing*

The student's progress toward the annual goals is measured and the parent is regularly informed of the results. The IEP describes when periodic progress reports will be provided.

*Jim and Veronica Brennan, Parents*

*J: The most important thing is that parents understand their role is to be an equal part of that IEP team with all the rights and responsibilities that that entails so any level of communication that you want to get from the other members of the team you have to provide for them. If you're coming back from summer vacation, letting them know how your child performed over the summer – how things went –*

**The IEP is Reviewed.** The IEP is reviewed by the IEP team at least once a year, or more often if warranted. If necessary, the IEP is revised.

*Robin Stranahan, Principal*

*It's my job as a principal to supervise staff, to make sure that they are implementing decided-upon interventions or differentiated instruction appropriately. Certainly, we track that. We monitor it and if a child is not making appropriate growth, we need to revisit and change what we do.*

The parent, as a team member, must be invited to participate in these meetings.

*Laura and Brad Ayres, Parents*

*L: My understanding of the IEP is that it's a fluid document and in our case Christopher's IEP was developed last spring. We are meeting with our son's special ed team next week to change his IEP because some of his goals are not meeting his needs right now.*

*B: See what part of the IEP is not working - and adjust it*

**The Student is Reevaluated.** At least every three years, or more often if needed, the student is typically reevaluated to find out if the student continues to be a child with a disability.

*Amanda LePage, Special Education Teacher & Counselor*

*Yesterday I had a triennial meeting and it's a student actually who is a senior and we retested and we looked at different data points and he has come quite a long way in terms of – he has a disability in reading and writing – and for example his research paper that he just wrote for government he wrote at 11.4 grade point average - grade level and so that's pretty significant for a student that was on an IEP and so – and he's not using any of his accommodations anymore and he probably hasn't for about the last probably 6 months or so and so at this point we as a team yesterday decided to staff the student out of special education so it was a big pat on the back for him to be able to say that he's done that his senior year.*

The parent or teacher may request a reevaluation. However, the school and the parent must agree to a reevaluation if conducted within one year of the last evaluation.

*Melanie Lawhorn, Parent*

*The most positive part of her is seeing her grow and change into a young woman and she's not 5 anymore. She's not playing with blocks anymore. She's grown and she's got thoughts of her own and it's just an amazing – sorry – it's an amazing process. I would like to say you just feel it. You just see some improvement in her social skills, in her intellectual skills. Her reading has increased. Her writing skills have increased. She has friends and that's – as a parent, that's an amazing, amazing gift that a child can have. So I don't know if there's one moment where I went "ah!" We've got it! We've got it figured out! It's just I feel that we are headed in the right place.*



**Resolving Disputes.** Because the parent and the school are partners in ensuring that the child is provided an appropriate education, it is in everyone's best interest, especially the child's, that the IEP Team members communicate with one another, respectfully and honestly.

*Gretchen Holland, Parent*

*I think when there's a breakdown of trust and there isn't an opportunity to really feel like you're collaborating, your ability to be able to know that your child is safe and trust the people that are going to care for them really decreases and so every year we felt an increase of trust in regards to the people that were surrounding her - how much they knew about her and that the teachers that were getting her understood who she was and wanted her there - it made it a lot easier to send her out the door every day.*

*Brad and Laura Ayres, Parents*

*B: Know that every adult in that room is there to help your child. That's their job - is to help your child. If they have a different opinion than you do of how to do something - then it's open for discussion.*

*Laura Writebol, Education Liaison, Denver Human Services*

*I've just seen too many times where there are a lot of assumptions and when you go back and try to talk about what the assumptions were about, we find that there was a lot of misinformation and misunderstandings - and so I would always encourage anyone involved with a school to be willing to have a very open discussion about anything related to the student.*

*Jim and Veronica Brennan, Parents*

*J: If we see a challenge, we go back and we look at the law; we ask for district policies and try to understand where they're coming from and how our challenge fits into that scheme. The special education director is the person you would ultimately go to if your needs aren't resolved along that line.*

If the parent and the school staff disagree about a special education matter (such as an evaluation or IEP), the IDEA establishes specific and formal ways to resolve the conflict. These are: voluntary mediation, filing a state level (investigative) complaint, and/or filing a due process hearing complaint.

*Yvette Plummer, Executive Director, Denver Metro Community Parent Resource Center*  
*Our organization suggests mediation because that may – you have someone that's impartial to get 2 people together and come to some kind of resolution is a really good way of airing things out – and so that's successful. If that doesn't work then say okay – we have to file a complaint. you want to work together with your district. Your child's gonna be there for who knows the next 10 years? 12 years? so you want to work together but sometimes it gets to a point where 2 people are very determined that what they believe is true and you have to go that route. You have to go to mediation. You have to go to resolution. You have to go to due process which is the least last last resort that you want but sometimes if you do say that, a district will say well I don't want to go to due process so let's see what we can do and then you go to resolution – a resolution meeting – and hopefully by the resolution meeting you can resolve the issue.*

**Conclusion.** Developing an IEP is a learning process which gets easier with time.

*Melanie Lawhorn, Parent*

*My daughter's now in high school so I feel pretty comfortable right now. I feel pretty confident that I know what she needs to have in the next 3 years to graduate and to be a successful adult – an active member of the community – so I feel like our stride is right on target right now. I feel like this is the most I've ever been involved in so many groups that they're really benefitting her. Years ago, I wouldn't say that. I would say I have no idea what I'm doing. I don't know what to do. I don't know if what I'm doing is right. I don't know where to go. What should I do? Should I put her in private school? Should I put her in public schools? What should I do to continue her education to the best of her ability? And it's scary – but right now I know what I've done. I know where we've put her and she's doing great and she's going to continue. She'll have a job. She'll have – a life.*

*Guadalupe Caballero, Parent*

*Sometimes I feel that I just need to continue fighting. I feel that it's important that I don't give up. Sometimes, it's very tiring, too. Sometimes, I'm just very tired and I feel that I'm going against the current. I don't know. I feel that it's when I look at Francisco and I'm the only one that he has and if I don't fight for him then who's going to do it.*

*Gretchen Holland, Parent*

*It's really about the kid and it's really about her potential and so our goal as parents is to really allow her to embrace what is good about her life and I think that it takes a while for parents to understand what this is really about and it's not about being right or wrong. It's not about knowing more than the teachers know or the professionals know that are with you. It's about keeping the interests of your child at heart and making sure that their life is as full and has as many opportunities as any of our other kids have.*

*Brad and Laura Ayres, Parents*

*B: Our dream for Christopher is that he is an accepted member of society – an accepted member of our community. We would like to see him participate in some sort of a job - and*

*L: have a purpose to his life*

*Elizabeth Schlomer, Parent*

*For my kids, I want them to enjoy what they do, feel good about what they do, know to do the right thing, and have a high self-esteem and high integrity.*

*Guadalupe Caballero, Parent*

*Well I just have a big hope to see him better. It's very difficult because when you have a child like this sometimes society is cruel too. So my hope for Francisco is that he knows how to be self-sufficient and to be happy.*

When parents and schools work together, the process works well, and good results for children can be realized.

*Elizabeth Schlomer, Parent*

*Oh wow – well my son is talking. He was nonvocal going into preschool. You know? that should quantify it for you pretty much. My daughter can read.... I'm gonna start crying - my daughter – you didn't tell me this was gonna happen! No they're serious – these are huge – you know? They're huge – when your daughter can read in kindergarten? Wow!*

*Melanie Lawhorn, Parent*

*My dreams for Tarin used to consist of – my son would go to college and she would live with me and my husband and we would probably find her some job that she could do. She loves helping kids and I thought it would stop there and I always told my son that when you're older you know – if we're gone you've gotta take care of her right? And now... she told me she doesn't want to live with us anymore. She wants her own apartment so – and she wants a blue car so – and she wants a dog and I have to come to her apartment and ring the doorbell so my dreams for her have blossomed in the last year. She wants to be independent*

*Yvette Plummer, Executive Director, Denver Metro Community Parent Resource Center*

*It's just beautiful seeing children with different - various disabilities helping each other, advocating for each other, getting to know each other and while their parents are learning how to better advocate for themselves, these kids are learning too.*

*Alicia Ornelas, Parent*

*Well, for the parents, to take care of their little angels – to just put in an effort to take care of them – and to leave their pain aside – they have to overcome that pain. They have to keep trying for their kids. They have to realize that everything is going to be okay. They need to get closer to their teachers – make teachers their friends – because our children are in their hands and we are actually leaving our treasures with the teachers. Our kids are our treasures.*

*Dr. Ed Steinberg, Assistant Commissioner, CDE*

*Knowledge is power and that the more knowledge you have regarding the IEP process, the greater the ability you will have as a parent to be an equal partner in your child's education.*