

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
Exceptional Children Division

**Facilitated IEP Team Meeting
Program**

QUESTIONS

&

ANSWERS

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CHOOSING TO USE FACILITATORS AT IEP TEAM MEETINGS

Parents or school systems have the right to request the Department of Public Instruction to provide facilitation services to assist the IEP team in making determinations regarding identification, evaluation, educational program, placement or the provision of a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities.

The facilitated IEP meeting will be conducted by a qualified and impartial facilitator at no cost to the parent or the school.

1. What is a facilitated IEP meeting?

Facilitation is a process utilizing an impartial, neutral facilitator to guide the process of the meeting and to assist members of the IEP team in communicating effectively. An IEP is developed by a collaborative team whose required members share responsibility for the process, content, and the results.

2. What are the benefits of facilitation?

- Focus remains on the student.
- Team members control the outcome.
- Working relationships between school representatives and the student's parents are maintained.
- Team members are able to discuss facts, feelings, and desired outcomes.
- Opportunities for creative, win-win solutions are possible.
- DPI facilitation services are free to the parties.

3. When should I consider facilitation?

In most cases parents and school representatives are able to reach determinations regarding identification, evaluation, educational program, placement or the provision of a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities through discussions and consensus decision-making.

However, a facilitator may be useful when the school personnel want to concentrate on the IEP issues to be determined rather than on the meeting process; if communication between parents and school personnel is becoming tense; or if parents and school personnel are becoming apprehensive about the next IEP meeting. A facilitator may also be used for any transition IEP meeting when there are typically more people at the table.

4. Who may request facilitation?

- Parents, including guardians and surrogate parents, of a child with a disability (or a child suspected of having a disability)
- An adult student with a disability
- A school representative

5. How is facilitation different from mediation?

Both mediators and facilitators have training and experience in helping clarify points of view, communicating more effectively, and resolving conflict. The mediation process is specifically designed to settle disputes. Facilitation is the process of helping the IEP team complete a task, solve a problem, or come to agreement to the mutual satisfaction of the participants. There does not need to be a conflict between the parties.

6. What is the role of the facilitator?

- To plan and design the meeting process, in partnership with the parties.
- To set a positive and welcoming tone for the meeting.
- To clarify the purpose of the meeting, the desired outcomes, the process to be used, and the roles of each person.
- To keep the discussion focused on the child.
- To draw out opinions and encourage full participation from all IEP team members.
- To monitor the pace of the meeting.
- To maintain neutrality, reflecting content and process back to the group.

7. How does one make a request for a facilitator?

A request for facilitation can be made by completing a Mediation/Facilitation Request Form. After completing all the information required by the form, it is then mailed or faxed to the following address:

Facilitation Coordinator
DPI Exceptional Children Division
6356 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-6356
Fax: (919) 807-3755

A staff person from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will contact the other party to provide notice of the request and to explain the process. As the LEA is legally responsible for convening IEP team meetings, the LEA must agree to have a DPI facilitator present. Conversely, the parent's consent is sought when the LEA requests the facilitator's presence. The Facilitation Coordinator will appoint a facilitator who will contact both parties to determine the desired outcomes and to develop the agenda for the meeting.

The form can also be downloaded by clicking the web site address:

<http://ec.ncpublicschools.gov/parent-resources/dispute-resolution/facilitation>

8. How does one prepare for a facilitated IEP meeting?

Facilitation is an opportunity for parents and schools to communicate persuasively their view of the child's needs and the program elements required for the child to make progress. Before entering into a facilitated IEP team meeting, the parties should take some time to define for themselves what they expect the outcome of the meeting to be. They should have a realistic view of the range of probable outcomes. However, IEP meetings work best when parents and school staff are open to listening carefully to each other, and feel free to explore new options. It is difficult for the meeting to be successful when the parties lock themselves into a position and are unable to move away from that position.

9. What happens at a facilitated IEP meeting?

- The facilitator explains his or her role, describes consensus decision-making, gets agreement on the agenda, establishes roles of group members (ex. scribe and time keeper), and guides the discussion toward the desired outcomes.
- The facilitator guides the parties through the items on the agenda. Ideas are recorded on pages for all team members to see, so information is visual as well as auditory.
- The facilitator ensures participation from all team members and uses a variety of strategies for reaching consensus.
- Determinations are documented and a prior written notice is issued to the parent.