

## **The Resolution Project @ Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.**

### **Facilitated IEP Meetings**

#### *Guidelines for School Officials*

Facilitated Individualized Education Program (FIEP) is a service funded by the District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and implemented by The Resolution Project. The goal of FIEP is to provide schools and parents with an opportunity to resolve disputes at the Individualized Education Program (IEP) level before more formal resolution processes are utilized. This document will assist school staff participating in a Facilitated IEP Meeting.



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### **Facilitated IEP Team Meeting**

FIEP is a voluntary, student-focused process led by a neutral third-party to help facilitate communication and the successful development of a student's IEP. FIEPs have been found to be an effective means to keep IEP teams focused on the development of IEPs for students while addressing some of the conflicts and disagreements that may arise.<sup>1</sup>

**Issues Addressed in FIEP Meetings** – There are many common disagreements or issues that can be addressed using FIEP meetings. These disagreements include, but are not limited to:

- *IEP goals*
- *Amount of special education or general education specialized instruction or school or classroom location of services*
- *Changes to more or less restrictive school placements*
- *Related services including amount of counseling hours*
- *Need for assistive technology services or dedicated aides*
- *Transportation services*
- *Disability classification or eligibility during triennial reviews*
- *Eligibility for Extended School Year (ESY)*
- *Termination of special education services*
- *Disagreements on classroom or testing accommodations*
- *Post-Secondary transition planning*

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<sup>1</sup> "Facilitated IEP Meetings: An Emerging Practice," Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education. Access at:

<http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/pdf/Facilitated%20IEP%20for%20CADRE%20English.pdf>.

### **When to Request Facilitated IEP**

- There is disagreement about any matter pertaining to a child's placement and/or IEP special education.
- There is a lack of trust or communication challenges between parents and school personnel.
- School personnel want to focus on parent concerns and IEP content while receiving assistance with the IEP meeting process.
- Parents and school personnel are becoming apprehensive about the next IEP meeting.
- The IEP team wants to minimize distractions and conflicting self-interests, and get assistance focusing on the needs of the student.

### **Benefits of FIEP**

- (1) Prevents use of formal resolution processes that can be more timely and costly;
- (2) Builds and improves relationships;
- (3) Improves communication among IEP team members;
- (4) Clarifies points of agreement and disagreement;
- (5) Provides opportunities for team members to resolve conflicts if they arise; and
- (6) Free for IEP teams.

### **IEP Facilitator**

The facilitator is an experienced and trained professional in facilitation and successful IEP development. The facilitators possess knowledge and skills in understanding group dynamics, group decision-making, and effective communication skills. The facilitator identifies underlying communication issues that disrupt group decision-making processes. The facilitator has the ability to apply facilitation tools in order to thoroughly explore issues to determine whether the IEP team can find agreement on them.

### **IEP Facilitator Role**

The facilitator is not a member of the IEP team and does not make educational decisions regarding the student or the IEP. The facilitator's primary goal is to assist team members in having a thoughtful, productive IEP meeting. The facilitator also keeps the meeting focused on the student, ensures everyone at the table has a voice, and encourages active listening by all participants.

### **Parties Who Can Request Facilitated IEP**

Parents, including guardians and or other authorized parties, of a child with a disability (or a child suspected of having a disability), an adult student with a disability (18 years or older), school personnel, or an LEA representative.

### **Attendance at a Facilitated IEP Meeting**

The required members of the IEP team are the same as any other IEP meeting.

Facilitated IEP meetings should not be adversarial; therefore **it is strongly recommended that both parties refrain from inviting attorneys**. If one party plans to invite an attorney to the meeting then he or she must inform the other party and the facilitator. The meeting can proceed with an attorney or attorneys present if both parties agree, but the attorney(s) should participate in a non-adversarial manner and comply with any ground rules established by the facilitator or the IEP team. This would also apply to any other person participating in a FIEP.

### **Preparation for a Facilitated IEP Team Meeting**

Adequate preparation and knowledge of the child by members of the IEP team and the facilitator will help with the decision-making and consensus-building during an FIEP meeting. The LEA must provide the assigned facilitator and all team members with a draft copy of the student's IEP and/or relevant supporting documents that will be reviewed at the meeting **at least 48 hours prior to the meeting**. Some examples of supporting documents include evaluation consent forms, analyses of existing data, procedural safeguards, evaluations, prior written notice and LRE reports. The documents that should be provided will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

### **When the IEP Team Cannot Reach Consensus**

If the IEP team cannot reach a consensus on an issue, the team should note the disagreement and move on to other issues to determine whether agreement is possible on them. The IEP team's focus in a FIEP should be on resolving as many issues as possible in order to best serve the educational interests of the student. The team is also encouraged to schedule follow-up meetings to address outstanding issues, and to identify any action steps to be taken prior to the follow-up meeting in order to move toward a resolution.

### **Documentation at the Completion of the Facilitated IEP Meeting**

The LEA and school staffs are still responsible for completing and providing the same documentation required for other IEP meetings.

### **After the Meeting**

The parent/guardian or adult student and LEA representative will be provided with a Participant Outcomes Survey to complete and return to the Facilitation Coordinator. The data collected will be used for evaluation of the facilitator and improving future Facilitated IEP Meetings.