

Big ideas for people with IEPs

The law guarantees free, appropriate education to everyone, in the least restrictive environment. For 10% of students (that's you), your parents and teachers have determined that mainstream classes are not appropriate or not flexible enough to meet your needs. IEPs are plans for how the school will follow the law so that you get an appropriate education. "General education" is the name for mainstream classes, and "special education" is the name for all the separate classes and additional services that are set up for students with IEPs.

The goals of your IEP should state

- The educational standard or level that you intend to reach. It may be the same as the standards for general education, or it may be more or less than that (or more in one area and less in others).
- How the school will give you the opportunity to reach that level.
- How you will adapt to what the school can provide. (The school cannot teach you exactly how you want it. It is always a compromise and you meet in the middle.)

It's a free country. No one can require you to change your personality, beliefs or learning style, unless it is harmful to others.

People change. You may have had a certain unhelpful behavior pattern, but that's not a good focus for the IEP because it is negative, probably temporary, and it may not be caused by what people think.

You (and family) are in control. You have to agree to the plan. You don't have to accept special ed status at all. If having a label doesn't help you, ignore it.

Debate topics

Inclusion versus separate classes – What's appropriate? – Should you be able to learn whatever you want? – How much accommodation is reasonable?

Creative assignment

1. Design a perfect school for yourself, either in pictures, notes, or paragraphs. Or describe a perfect school day. Base it on your strengths and interests. You can include ideas like no tests, no bullies, be able to study kangaroos all day, whatever would make it an exciting place to study subjects you like, and would help you be successful - in whatever way you understand success.
2. Discuss with a teacher: In your perfect school, would you reach a higher or lower level in any subject area, compared to the real school? Is there something about your unique personality or disability that means you should reach a different level?
3. Discuss with a teacher: In your perfect school, what is different about the environment or the way things are done? Is there something about your unique personality or disability that requires things to be done differently?
4. "Accommodations" are what the school has to do differently for you based on your IEP. Look at the list of common accommodations. Which of these would you like to have, and which do you really need? What other ones do you need? Find a way to meet in the middle - something that you can adapt to, and a school can actually do.