

Tips for Getting Off to a Good School Start

Advocates often experience a significant increase in IEPs and other special education matters during April and May. A frequent parent concern at that time is the quality of programming the student received during the school year. Parents often want the next year to “go better.”

The start of a new school year is a good time to look at what parents can do to get the year off to a good start and keep things going in a positive direction. Here are some suggestions for making that happen.

1. Give your child and your child’s primary teacher a couple of weeks to settle into the classroom routine.
2. After the first couple of weeks, call your child’s teacher and make an appointment to talk either by telephone or in person to discuss your child’s daily schedule, classroom needs and behaviors, what is going well and what could be going better. Ask the teacher to review your child’s IEP before this discussion takes place. Keep the meeting brief, no more than 15-20 minutes.
3. If specific issues arose during your conversation with the teacher, find out if you can provide additional information or connect the teacher with a private therapist who serves your child or other individual who can provide the information. Ask that a note or follow-up telephone be sent to you after the information is received and the teacher has had some time to determine if the concern has been resolved.
4. Three to six weeks later make another call to the teacher or send a note asking if things are going well and if there are any concerns. Follow up on these as needed.
5. If your child’s annual IEP review is not scheduled to occur in the fall, ask for a brief status meeting before the end of the fall semester. People present should include the child’s primary teacher and any other staff members who regularly work with your child. Ask what is going well and what could be going better. If you feel your child may qualify for extended school year services, this is the time to ask that data be collected as to your child’s performance when he or she returns from the winter school break.
6. Communicate! Don’t wait to address problems, hoping they will go away. Good, early communication is the key to a successful school year. Notifying your child’s teacher when you have a concern and communicating regularly on important issues will help you, your child and your child’s teacher to have a good year.
7. If any issue would best be addressed by calling a formal IEP review, do it! Ask that an IEP review be scheduled and identify the purpose or issue to be addressed. Prepare for the meeting just as you would for your child’s annual review.