

# Making the Most of Your IEP

## IDEA

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997)  
Federal Legislation

Kansas IDEA (state legislation to bring our regulations up to date with the federal act.)

Kansas is the only state to include gifted in the definition of "exceptional students included in IDEA.

The major parts which do not apply to gifted students:

- Least Restrictive Environment (usually the regular classroom)
- Pre-school services (age 3-5)
- Discipline section. (Gifted students may be suspended and providing services is not required during this time.)

## IEP

Individual Education Program (or Plan)

Kansas is one of 13 states that includes Gifted in Special Education  
Not every state mandates gifted education. Some require identification only.

### **What is it?**

Document outlining student needs and the services students will receive along with goals and benchmarks or objectives for specific areas.

### **Present level of performance? (PLEP)**

How does a child's "giftedness" impact their learning in the general education setting?

### **Goals and Benchmarks/Objectives**

What are the specific activities that the student will engage in, and what are the steps that will help them reach the goal? How do they relate to the general education classroom and content?

### **Program Modifications**

What parts of the general program will be modified and how? What support will be needed for the classroom teacher or others providing services?

### **Transition**

How will we help the student as they make the transition from high school to the next school/work setting?

**All students have the right to a purposeful, meaningful school curriculum.**

## **Obstacles to Overcome**

### **Lack of teachers trained as specialists in gifted education.**

There is a shortage each year of teachers with gifted education endorsement in Kansas. Not enough teachers are going through the programs to meet the need - especially in rural areas.

### **Lack of Regular Education Teacher Training.**

Most teachers have had little or no training in working with gifted students. Differentiation of curriculum can be time consuming and overwhelming. Techniques for modifying curriculum and research on what works with gifted kids hasn't reached the mainstream teacher (or administrator.)

### **Lack of Time and Resources**

Those teachers who DO have training often lack planning time for developing

or modifying curriculum or the resources and materials with which to implement the modification. They do not always have flexible access to media centers, and scheduling for ability grouping among teachers or grade levels can be a monumental nightmare.

### **School Reform and School Improvement**

Measures such as standards-based initiatives and basic skills assessments make it difficult for the teacher to innovate. Pressure is put on meeting or exceeding the standards and test scores, not on enriching the curriculum. Teachers may be afraid to vary from the basic "plan."

### **Site Based Management**

Parents in the past had to advocate at the district level for gifted education. Now it will often be a school-based advocacy, and as a student moves from elementary, to middle, to high school, the response may be different at each level.

### **Anti-intellectualism/Fear of Elitism (equity or equality?)**

Although ability grouping, cluster grouping and acceleration have all been documented as positive and cost effective methods of meeting the needs of high ability students, they are often met with fear of "elitism" or with emotional "baggage" from experiences in education 15 or 20 years ago. We are also in the midst of "whole group instruction" in many reading and math programs for the elementary school.

### **Differentiation:**

This is the big "buzz" word in education at the moment. You may find that administrators and teachers will tell you that they are differentiating the classroom curriculum to meet the needs of all learners.

"Bottom line advice: if educators insist that your gifted child's needs can be consistently met in the regular, academically diverse classroom, insist on knowing specifically how this will be done. Absent aggressive ability grouping, clustering, or acceleration, the only way to consistently challenge gifted kids is expertly planned and executed differentiation. Ask which staff member(s) will deliver this strategy, where they were trained, what their budget for out-of-level materials is, when their extra planning and preparation time will occur, and how the district is planning on reducing class size. If all of these

requirements are not in place, differentiation and challenge for the gifted will not occur consistently, regardless of what you are told."

*Excerpt from What parents of Gifted Kids Can Reasonably Expect from Schools by Steve Schroeder-Davis, Minnesota Council for the Gifted & Talented.*

### **So . . . What Can We Do to Overcome the Obstacles?**

- Pick the important battles and issues
- Base your request on the NEEDS that your child has
- Offer assistance in the classroom or outside the classroom. Become a support person for the classroom teacher with time, materials, or emotional support and advocacy - make it a win/win situation
- Join/form a parent group - present information for PTA meetings and other parent groups
- Become a member of one of the school's planning groups where you will have input into curriculum and philosophy
- Share your expertise on gifted education. If you have developed a positive relationship with your child's teacher, suggest possible modifications and alternatives; "would it be OK if . . ."
- When advocating, use the "sports" analogy. (ability grouping, singling out the best for special training and advancement, etc.) Aren't academics just as important?

**Ideal vs. Probable**

Every parent has an idea of the ideal classroom. And very few attain it. So what can/should we try to aim for in the IEP meeting?

There are several kinds of classroom modification that can benefit your child

Compacting - completing work in a shorter amount of time or "testing out"

Acceleration - working at a higher level (6th grade math in 5th grade)

Cluster Grouping - assigning several high-ability students to one classroom

Flexible Grouping or Ability Grouping - skills or interest based

Differentiation (pre-testing, modification of assignments, alternate assignments)

Content - what they are learning

Process - how they are learning

Product - how they demonstrate what they have learned

These areas can be modified in amount, complexity, depth, creativity, etc.