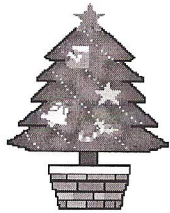


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## How to Handle Disagreements at IEP Meetings (or Playing 20 Questions with the Devil)

by Sonja Kerr, Esq.

Parents often say that when they go to IEP meetings, the school staff won't answer their questions or listen to their requests.

Here is a good approach that parents can use when caught up in the a IEP meeting quagmire.

**1. Take a piece of paper, draw a table with three columns. Head them like this:**

**What Mom Wants - School's Response - Resolved?**

**2. Make your list.**

In the first column, make a list of what you want for your child. Don't get mired up on how to word it, just write what you think your child needs.

For example, "he needs 1:1 reading help" or "He needs counseling once a week" or whatever.

**3. Take this paper with you to the meeting.**

As the discussions begin, tell the IEP team that you have a few questions too. At various points in the meeting, ask very sweetly for whatever is under column one.

Many times school officials don't respond to parent's questions.

If they don't respond to you, just say, "I'll just take that as a no, then, okay?" or "I'll just write that one down as 'no response.'"

This will confuse them because you are not arguing, you are just asking and taking notes.

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If they don't agree, ask again, very politely, if they could send you a letter about whatever they don't agree on. Note this in your written record.

**This is like playing 20 questions with the devil.**

You won't convince most people to see things your way by arguing with them. You may, however, raise enough questions and have enough proof when you leave your meeting to show that your school district is denying FAPE.

**5. Write your follow-up letter.**

After the meeting send a copy of your filled-in form to the school along with a letter that says, "Gee, I wish we could have answers to these questions."

I have been suggesting that parents use this approach for about a year. Usually, it serves as a great option when you are feeling very frustrated with your school people and don't seem to be getting anywhere.

The **worst thing that happens** is that the entire second column reads "no response" and the third column is blank. The **best thing that happens** is that they actually respond to you and you know where you stand.

If they don't respond, this shows that the school is not listening to you. This forms the basis for your position that you are not an equal participant in the IEP process and that your child is being denied FAPE.

***FAPE: To quote one hearing officer, "More of the same failed approach is not FAPE."***

It's critical to include objective measurement in IEPs. Without objective measurement, there is no FAPE, in my opinion. Without objective measurement, there cannot be a determination as to whether progress is being made.

If one cannot determine that progress is being made, FAPE is being denied and it is incumbent on the school district to change their approach.

***Measuring Progress: Here are a few ways to***

**Advocate's Bookstore****Bestsellers****Disabilities****Special Ed****Evals****IEPs****Legal****Strategies****Negotiate****Parents****Kids****Updates*****measure progress.***

Many IEPs do not include ways to measure progress objectively. Schools often object to testing the child. Go to the independent specialist or clinic that evaluated your child and ask them for information about tests that can be administered quickly and frequently. Sometimes schools balk at using standardized measures because standardized measures are used more for evaluation than for tracking progress.

I have a student with autism who has been given the PLS-3 for speech. When I talked to the speech clinician, she said that the PLS-3 can be given every 3 months. You can also use a standardized language sample. This is usually a formal interview of the child using language that is scored. This is often tape recorded which gives you the opportunity to hear your child in a school-type setting. Videotaping is another option. This can be done on a regular basis.

Second, when school district balk at using standardized tests, one reason for this is because the teachers believe that standardized testing is not a valid measure of the child's skills because of the child's disability.

**You do have options.**

First, you can use standardized testing. Second, you can use standardized testing but indicate that it may be of questionable validity because of the impact of the child's disability. (Many standardized tests have not been normed for kids with disabilities.) Third, you can use both standardized testing and structured sampling -- this will give a better view of the child.

**Good luck!****Sonja Kerr****Website:** <http://www.kerrlaw.com>**Email:** [info@kerrlaw.com](mailto:info@kerrlaw.com)**Subscribe to our Newsletter****Your Email:****Your Zipcode:**