Individualized Education Plan ("IEP")

The IEP refers to a meeting by a team of people to plan your child's intervention - the members may include the student's parent(s) or guardian, a special education teacher, a regular education teacher if appropriate, a district representative or school administrator, and the student if appropriate. It also refers to the IEP document which spells out the details of special education services and the delivery for the student. Here are basic principles of effective advocacy for parents to consider prior to attending the IEP meeting.

1. Identify and prioritize your objectives before the IEP meeting. Ask yourself what you would like to get out of the IEP meeting and what issues are most important to you. The private assessment and recommendations will help you identify the core components that should be a part of your child’s educational program and program and placement. You can use it to advocate for your child and to advise the IEP team what your child really needs.
2. If you have a private assessment, you should provide your school district with a copy 4-5 day before the IEP meeting to allow them sufficient time to review the report. Make sure everyone on the team has a copy of the reports and ask that all members of the IEP team to meaningfully consider the recommendation. Use the recommendations on the assessment to guide not only your objectives, but also your questions at the IEP meeting.
3. Always audio record the meeting by providing a 24-hour prior written notification to the school.
4. IEP is truly a balancing act to be “cooperative” with the IEP team while also advocating for the educational supports that are appropriate for your child. You can disagree without being disagreeable. No matter what happens during your IEP meeting, you should remain cooperative and act reasonably with your school district at all stages of the IEP development. Make sure all the records reflect that you have always been open-minded and willing to consider the district’s recommendation.
5. Sometimes the school district would call “a team meeting” with the parents to discuss the child’s progress without actually calling it for what it is: an IEP meeting. The IEP meetings entail important legal protections for the parents while “team meetings” do not.
6. Be organized. Keeping your IEPs, evaluations, and all other documents can be the differences between advocacy and failure. Sometimes the small note, card, or newsletter does not seem relevant at the time can become highly relevant later. Keep everything in order.
7. Get it in writing. IEPs are binding legal documents, and if it is not in writing then it did not happen! Keep your own note, and make sure the IEP note correctly reflects certain key points discussed during the meeting. If you do not agree on certain points, insist that your dissent is written down, and the district's rationale is written down.
8. Don’t sign the IEP on the spot. Tell the school that you will think it over and will get back to them. Talk to your spouse, professionals who work with your child, and if necessary, your special education attorney.