

**Florida Department of Education (FDOE)
Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services**

FACT SHEET

STATE-FACILITATED INDIVIDUAL EDUCATIONAL PLAN (SFIEP) MEETINGS

What is Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Facilitation?

Facilitation is a voluntary process through which a trained and impartial third party helps establish a common agenda and keeps a meeting focused and moving forward. Most ESE meetings do not need the services of a facilitator. Generally, facilitation is requested when parents and school personnel are experiencing challenges in communicating or if a meeting is expected to be highly complex or possibly difficult. Any meeting related to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act may be facilitated and can be requested by a parent, guardian or a school district representative.

SFIEP meetings may:

- resolve disagreements concerning identification, evaluation, educational placement and a free appropriate public education for an exceptional student
- clarify issues causing the disagreement
- provide those involved with uninterrupted opportunities to present their points of view
- stimulate mutual problem-solving efforts
- promote positive working relationships between parents and school personnel
- help parents and school personnel focus on what they have in common—the student—rather than the issues that divide them

Many school districts have implemented their own forms of local facilitation. Participation in this process of problem solving at the district level is voluntary but strongly encouraged by the Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (bureau).

Facilitator Assignments

The bureau maintains a list of trained and qualified facilitators who are knowledgeable in laws and regulations of special education and related services, as well as the art of running meetings. Facilitators are independent contractors who are assigned by the bureau on a rotational and geographic basis.

Facilitation is Voluntary

Although either the district or the parent may request facilitation, both parties must agree to participate, as the facilitation process is voluntary. After a request for facilitation is made to the bureau and both parties agree, the bureau will schedule the facilitation. Generally, the facilitation occurs within 14 days after the facilitator is assigned.

SFIEP meetings can occur either face-to-face or virtually. Participants are advised to set aside four to six hours for this process and should plan accordingly.

The Facilitator's Role

A facilitator will develop a collaborative agenda, aid parties in keeping the meeting focused on the student, provide opportunities for teams to resolve conflicts as they arise, and support the participation of the team members. Facilitators are neither decision makers nor members of teams. Facilitators assist in generating ground rules, maintain open communication among team members, clarify points of agreement and disagreement, and maintain impartiality.

Cost for Facilitation

In Florida, state IEP facilitation is free to all participants and contractors are paid by the FDOE.

Participant Evaluations

An opportunity to evaluate the process will be provided to all parties following the facilitation. The purpose of the participant evaluation is to determine the usefulness of facilitation in resolving educational disputes. No personally identifiable information is shared. Your cooperation in evaluating of the process is appreciated and will be valuable in guiding future efforts.

Instructions for Requesting an SFIEP Meeting

1. Fill out the information that pertains to you and sign the form entitled, "Request for Exceptional Student Education (ESE) State Facilitated Individual Educational Plan (FIEP) Meeting," which is located on the FDOE website at <http://fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/dispute-resolution/>.
2. Send the form to the other party to be completed and signed, or submit it directly to the bureau by email at SFIEP@fldoe.org. The FDOE facilitation coordinator will contact both parties to confirm their willingness to work with a facilitator to develop an IEP.
3. If the parties fill out this form at the same time, the school district agency will forward the form to the FDOE.
4. Once the request form is signed by the parents and the school personnel, the school district schedules an IEP meeting at a mutually agreeable time and place, and faxes or emails the notice of the meeting and the current IEP to the FDOE. The notice will include the date, time and location of the meeting. The FDOE requires that parties requesting a facilitator do so at least 10 working days before the scheduled date of the IEP meeting to give the FDOE facilitation coordinator time to confirm that both parties agree to use facilitation; locate an available facilitator; and gather and share relevant information. The FDOE facilitation coordinator will make every attempt to locate a facilitator who is available for the meeting date and time chosen by the IEP team. If no facilitator is available, the IEP team may need to reschedule the meeting or proceed without the facilitator. Please note that an SFIEP meeting will not be scheduled if the facilitation coordinator determines that the issues identified by the parties are not related to the student's IEP or otherwise determines that facilitation is not an appropriate resolution option. In such cases, the facilitation coordinator will work with the parties to identify other resolution options.
5. For additional information, contact the FDOE by phone at 850-245-0475 or via email at SFIEP@fldoe.org.