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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to help parents understand how a child becomes eligible for special education and related services and how to use letter writing to effectively communicate with the school when necessary. Initial information is presented in question-and-answer format and covers parental rights, parental responsibilities, and using letters to request services. Sample letters are offered for the parent who wants to: (1) discuss a problem, (2) request an initial evaluation for special education services, (3) request a meeting to review the Individualized Education Program, (4) request a change of placement, (5) request records, (6) request an independent evaluation, (7) request a due process hearing, (8) follow up on a previous letter, and (9) give positive feedback. An attachment presents a flow chart of the special education process from initial referral through evaluation, meetings, and final agreement. (DB)

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A PARENT'S GUIDE

Special Education and Related Services: Communicating Through Letter Writing

Volume II Number 1

September, 1991

by
Susan Ferguson and Suzanne Ripley

This *Parent's Guide* presents a general overview of how a child becomes eligible for special education and related services, parents' rights and responsibilities, and a school's rights and responsibilities. Because the focus of this issue is on communicating through letter writing, we have identified points in the process when writing a letter is necessary or useful. The term "parent" is used throughout this *Parent's Guide* to include foster parents, legal guardians, or any primary caregiver who is functioning as a parent.

Throughout your child's school years, there is always a need to communicate with school: teachers, administrators, and others concerned with your child's education. There are also times when the school needs to communicate with you, as the parent. Some of this communication is informal, such as phone calls, comments in your child's notebook, a chat at the bus stop or at a school function. Other forms of communication are more formal and will need to be written.

Letters provide both you and the school staff with a record of ideas, concerns, and suggestions. Putting your thoughts on paper gives you the opportunity to take as long as you need to state your concerns specifically, to think over what you've written, to make changes, and perhaps to have someone else read over the letter and make suggestions. Letters also give people the opportunity to go over what's been "said" several times. A lot of confusion and misunderstanding can be avoided by writing down thoughts and ideas.

However, writing letters is a skill. Each letter will differ according to the situation, the person to whom you are writing, and the issues you are discussing. This *Parent's Guide* will help you in writing to professionals involved in your child's education.

Sample letters are shown for when you want to:

1. Discuss a problem.
2. Request an initial evaluation for special education services.
3. Request a meeting to review the IEP.
4. Request a change of placement.
5. Request records.
6. Request an independent evaluation.
7. Request a due process hearing.
8. Write a Follow-up letter.
9. Give positive feedback.

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SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA)**, Public Law (P.L.) 101-476 (formerly known as the **Education of the Handicapped Act, [EHA]**, P.L. 94-142 and its amendments), mandates minimum requirements for a free appropriate public education for children and youth with disabilities, including early intervention services, and defines these children's rights. Each state, using this law as a guideline, develops specific policies for the special education and related services of children with disabilities in that state. Each local public school district follows these guidelines and will base its policies on the federal laws and regulations, as well as on the laws and policies developed by the state. Copies of each state's special education and early intervention policies are available to parents.

Q: *How does this really work?*

A: A flow chart is provided at the end of this *Parent's Guide* to show how the process works, beginning with "I think my child may have a problem" and leading to the provision of special education and related services. The process of identifying that a child may be in need of special education and related services can begin with the parent or a professional. The attached *NICHCY State Resource Sheet* lists many of the people involved in special education and disability issues in your state.

Q: *What are my rights as a parent?*

A: Your rights begin with your child's right to a **Free and Appropriate Public Education**. This is often referred to as **FAPE**. Free means that your child's education is at public expense and at no cost to you. Appropriate means that the educational program for your child will be tailored to his or her individual needs. Any change in the provision of FAPE to your child should be in writing.

You, as a parent, have the right to be fully informed by the school of all rights that are guaranteed to you under the law. Each state, county, and school system has written policies and guidelines that are available to you. Ask your child's school to send you copies.

Your rights also include:

1. The right to be notified, whenever the school wants to evaluate your child, either to identify a possible disability or to measure changes in your child's needs; the school wants to change your child's educational placement; or the school refuses your request for an evaluation or a change of placement. The school must notify you in writing for all of the above.
2. The right to request an evaluation of your child if you think your child may need special education and/or related services. It is best that you put this request in writing.
3. The right to informed consent. For example, if the school is suggesting that your child be evaluated for a possible disability, then this means that you sign a form which says you understand and agree with the proposed plan to evaluate your child. There are other occasions when a family's written consent will be required.

4. The right to obtain an independent evaluation from professionals outside the school system. The results of these evaluations must be considered in any educational decisions made for your child. You also have the right to request that the school system pay for an independent evaluation if you believe the school's evaluation was not appropriate.
5. The right to request a re-evaluation to determine if your child's educational needs have changed. Depending on the results of this re-evaluation, a new **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** may be developed and a change in placement may be recommended.
6. The right to have your child tested in the language he or she knows best. For example, if your child's primary language is Spanish, and he or she is not fluent in English, then you have the right to request that your child be tested in Spanish. If your child is deaf, he or she has the right to an interpreter during testing.
7. The right to review all your child's records. You may also obtain copies of these records, although the school may charge you a reasonable fee for making copies. If you feel that any of the information contained in your child's records is inaccurate or misleading or violates the privacy or other rights of your child, you may request that the information be changed. If the school refuses your request, you have the right to request a hearing to question the school's refusal.
8. The right to participate in the development of your child's IEP. The school must make every effort to notify you of the IEP meeting and to arrange it at a time and place that is convenient for everyone who will attend.
9. The right to the least restrictive educational environment for your child. Whenever possible, students should be educated in their neighborhood school with other children their age. The specifics of how this will be accomplished is part of the IEP.
10. The right to a yearly review. The school must review your child's IEP at least once a year and must re-evaluate your child at least once every three years. But you, as parents, can request an IEP review at any time you feel that your child's needs have changed.
11. The right to a due process hearing. If the school and family cannot come to an agreement on the needs, placement, or program of a student, both parties have the right to request a due process hearing to resolve their differences.

Q: *What are the parents' responsibilities?*

A: The special education team includes education specialists, therapists, medical personnel, the parent(s) or person(s) who have custody of the child, and the child when appropriate. As a full member of this team, the parent has responsibilities. These may not be as clearly defined as your rights, but they are just as important. Your most basic responsibility is to be an active team member, to establish effective communication between home and school, and to share information about your child's education and development with other members of the team.

Your specific responsibilities include:

1. After finding that your child is eligible for special education and after an IEP has been written, but before placement is determined, try to visit the proposed classes/schools and any alternatives which are being considered for your child. This will help you become familiar with the programs under consideration. Talking to other parents is very useful, but seeing programs for yourself is also important.
2. Before going to visit a school to look at a program, call ahead and ask the principal to schedule a time for you to visit. This is not only polite, but will assure that your visit comes during a regularly scheduled activity. If you also want to talk to the teacher, let the people arranging the observation time know, so that they can schedule a meeting.
3. Once your child is settled in his or her school class, find time to visit at least once or twice a year to see how your child is doing. Often volunteering to help with school or classroom activities is an effective way to get involved. Teachers appreciate the help, and it gives you the opportunity to see your child in a school situation.
4. Notify your child's school, teacher, therapist(s), or nurse of any changes which would affect your child's participation in school. Examples include: changes in your child's medical condition or medication; extreme difficulty with homework; boredom with school work; social difficulties; or any other related difficulties the school personnel should be aware of.
5. Provide the school staff with any relevant information from outside evaluations. Have copies of these reports sent to your child's school.
6. If problems arise, you should communicate your concerns about your child's special education program to the school. Talk to the principal, teachers, therapist(s) etc. to allow everyone involved in your child's schooling to informally observe the situation and make adjustments before minor problems become major difficulties.
7. Let school staff know when you observe signs that your child's current program may need to be changed. The more time the school has to arrange for re-evaluations, the better.
8. If your child needs any special arrangements for testing, such as assistive technology, an interpreter, or foreign language tester, let the school know right away. Even if your child's teacher knows about his or her unique needs, the evaluation staff may not be aware of them and will need time to make the proper arrangements.
9. If you would like to review and/or obtain copies of your child's records, make this request, in writing, several weeks before you need to have these records. School secretarial staff may be quite busy, especially at certain times of the year. Also, records from previous years may be kept somewhere other than in the school building, making access more complicated than just opening a file drawer.
10. It is very important that you attend IEP meetings. These meetings generally occur only once a year and are usually held during the day. If you have a job, talk to your employer or make any necessary child care arrangements so that you will be able to attend during the work day. If you have

difficulties getting away during these hours, inform your child's teacher and ask if the school can be of assistance. Sometimes the school can work out child care needs or talk to an employer to help you find the time to attend the IEP meeting.

11. Any time you have scheduling difficulties with school meetings, tell the school people involved in that meeting. They will want to know that you are interested in your child's schooling and that you want to be actively involved. There are always situations in which people cannot coordinate their schedules; the more information the school has about your schedule, the more they can work to arrange meetings and school functions at more convenient times for you. All too often, educators interpret poor attendance as lack of interest.

12. If you are in disagreement with the school on any aspect of your child's program, try to work out the disagreement before resorting to a **due process hearing**. Many schools now have formalized methods for mediation or can make such arrangements. Mediation can often bring solutions to light and is less negative than more formal or legal action. In any discussion of rights and responsibilities, it is important to remember the spirit of the law. The goal should always be the same: to provide the best opportunities for success for all children, including those who have differing needs and abilities. To achieve this goal it is important that all people involved in special education planning work together. It's even part of the law. As team members you will each need to communicate your opinions and concerns constructively. It is not always clear what opportunities are needed for a student with special needs and which will be best. Thus, arriving at a solution to disagreements may require some trial and error and some compromising.

REQUESTING SERVICES: A GUIDE TO LETTER WRITING

Q: *What do I do to request services?*

A: Each state and school district has its own guidelines for special education. Again, it is important for you to ask your **Director of Special Education** or your school principal to explain them to you. They will also provide you with written guidelines.

These guidelines will tell you exactly what you have to do to request services. It's a good idea to put all your requests in writing, even if it's not required by your school district. A letter will avoid confusion and provide everyone — you, the school, and evaluation team — with a record of your request. **ALWAYS KEEP A COPY OF EACH LETTER YOU SEND.**

Q: *How long does it take to get an answer to my letter?*

A: It is useful to remember that if you write to a large organization, there may be several people who will handle your letter before it gets to the person to whom it is addressed. Mail is often opened by someone who sorts letters and puts them in the appropriate mail slots at school or in the office. A secretary may collect mail from the boxes and sort through to answer all general requests or other non-personal mail. Then your letter may be moved to the right person's mail box, and he or she will pick it up within a few days, depending on the time of year and other work in progress. Obviously, smaller offices will have fewer steps and very large offices may have more.

(Thus, response time will vary.) Often state or school district guidelines specify the amount of time a school has to respond to your request. Although the federal law states that schools must respond in a "timely manner" or within a "reasonable" period of time, most states and districts actually define this period by days. If you have not heard from the school within 10 working days of sending your letter, it is certainly all right to phone the office to make sure your letter was received and to ask when you can expect an answer. If you have asked for a meeting or other services which may require coordinating with several other people, it may delay the response to your request.

If you need a letter answered in fewer than 10 working days (for instance if you are moving or if your child's health suddenly changes), it might be useful to call the office and let them know that you have sent a letter and would like a response as soon as possible (or by a specific date). That way, the staff can speed up the process a bit.

Q: *To whom do I address my letter?*

A: This will depend on the type of request you are making in your letter. Call your child's teacher or school principal, explain the type of request you are making (e.g., request for an initial evaluation of your child or for a meeting to review your child's IEP), and ask who should get the letter. The principal is responsible for activities in his or her school, and you can address certain letters to your child's school principal. In some instances, you might find that the letter should be sent to the local Director of Special Education. Call to make sure of the spelling of the person's name and his or her correct mailing address. Also, remember to make a copy of your letter to send to your child's teacher, so that he or she will be aware of what is going on and know your concerns.

Q: *In general, what do I say in my letter?*

A: When writing any business letter, it is important to keep it short and to the point. Ask yourself these questions, answer them for yourself, and state them in your letter:

- Why am I writing this?
- Specifically, what are my concerns?
- What would I like the person to whom I'm writing to do about this situation?
- What are my questions?
- What sort of response do I want: a letter, a meeting, a phone call, or something else?

Q: *What else do I need to say in my letter?*

A: Each letter you write should have certain basic information included.

- Be sure there is a date on your letter.
- Be sure to give your child's full name and current class placement.
- Say what you want, rather than what you don't want.
- Be sure to give an address and /or daytime phone number where you can be reached.
- Be sure there is a question or request in the letter, so that the person to whom you are writing can answer you.

The remainder of this *Parent's Guide* presents sample letters to help you approach this task. The letters address some of the many reasons parents may have for writing, including when you want to:

1. Discuss a problem.
2. Request an initial evaluation for special education services.
3. Request a meeting to review the IEP.
4. Request a change of placement.
5. Request records.
6. Request an independent evaluation.
7. Request a due process hearing.
8. Write a follow-up letter.
9. Give positive feedback.

Sample Letter 1: This is a general letter format for discussing a problem.

	Today's Date (include month, day, and year)
	Your Street Address City, State, Zip Code Day time telephone number
Full Name of Person to whom you're writing Title Name of School/Organization Street Address City, State, Zip Code	
Dear (name of person, use title and last name),	
In this paragraph explain who you are, give the full name of your child and his or her current class placement, and, VERY BRIEFLY, explain the reason you are writing.	
In this paragraph explain what you would like to have happen or what you would like to see changed. You may BRIEFLY say what you would not like, but spend most of this paragraph saying what you want.	
Say what type of response you want. For instance, do you need to meet with anyone, do you want a return letter, or a phone call?	
Finally, give your daytime telephone number and let them know that you expect to hear from them soon (or give a date, "by the 15th").	
Sincerely yours,	
Your full name	

Q: *Can anyone help me with this?*

A: Yes. There are many people who can help you with letter writing and other tasks relating to your child's special needs. Parents and professionals have discussed similar issues for many years. You can profit from their experience by talking to them and reading what they have written.

As always, be sure to keep a copy of your letter for your own files.

There are disability and parent organizations in every state that can help. Local chapters of state, regional, and national organizations also can work with you. Most states have a federally-funded Parent Training and Information Project; the staff there can help explain the laws, policies, and procedures of accessing special education programs. Members of disability organizations are families and professionals who are concerned with issues of a specific disability. State offices, like the State Education Agency, Developmental Disability Council, or Mental Health Agency, can also explain procedures. Many states now are funding parent resource centers in local school districts. Ask your Director of Special Education if there's a local parent resource center in your area.

NICHCY's *State Resource Sheet* lists a selection of state agencies, disability organizations, and parent groups. If you need more information or contacts in other areas, call or write NICHCY.

Sample Letter 2: Request for an Initial Evaluation for Special Education Services

Today's Date (include month, day, and year)
Your Full Return Address
Name of Principal Full Address
Dear (name of Principal),
I am writing to request that my son/daughter, (full name), be evaluated for special education services. I have been worried lately that he/she is not doing very well in school and that he/she may need some special help in order to learn. He/she is in the (grade level and name of current teacher) at (name of school).
Specifically, I am worried because (name of your child) does/does not(keep this paragraph short, but give one or two reasons for your concern about your child).
I understand that I have to give written permission in order to have (name of child) tested. However, I would first like to know more about the tests, the testing process, and when this can be done. I would be happy to talk with you or another school official about my child. You can send me the information or call me during the day at (daytime telephone number). Thank you.
Sincerely yours,
Your full name

Sample Letter 3: Request for a Meeting to Review the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Note: The Individualized Education Program defines your child's program. As you know, each year there is a regularly scheduled IEP review; however, you can request a review whenever you feel changes need to be made in your child's program.

Q: What might be some reasons to request an IEP review?

A: You may want to request a review if:

- Your child has met one, or several, of the goals written in the IEP;
- Your child does not seem to be making any progress toward one, or several, of the goals written in IEP;
- You feel additional services should be added in order for your child to progress;
- You feel a service is no longer necessary in order for your child to succeed;
- Your child has experienced major changes, such as illness, surgery, or injury.

Today's Date (include
month, day, and year)

Your Full Return Address

Name of Principal
Full Address

Dear (name of Principal),

I am writing to request an IEP review meeting. I would like to discuss making some possible changes in (child's name, grade level, and teacher) IEP as I feel that

I would also like to have (name of specialists) attend. I think his/her/their ideas about the changes we may make will be valuable.

I (or my husband/wife and I) can arrange to meet with you on (days) between (give a range of time, such as between 3:00 and 5:00). Please let me know what time would be best for you.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. My daytime telephone number is (000) 000-0000. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely yours,

Your full name

Sample Letter 4: Request for a Change of Placement

Q: *What might be some reasons to request a change in your child's class placement? (Remember placement is based on the IEP, so to request a change in placement means that you are actually requesting an IEP review to discuss a change in your child's needs.)*

A: The reasons for requesting a change in your child's placement would be based on concerns that your child's educational, social, or physical needs are not being appropriately met. A review of your child's progress, talks with your child's teacher(s) and therapist(s) as well as discussing this with your child, when appropriate, would reveal that this placement needs to be reconsidered and the IEP reviewed.

These placement concerns might include:

- Changes in your child's needs;
- Current class size may be too large or too small;
- Current class may be too academic or not academic enough;
- This class may not provide opportunities for appropriate socialization;
- The building may be too difficult for your child to get around;
- Or any other reason that this class placement is not working out successfully.

Today's Date (include
month, day, and year)

Your Full Return Address

Name of Principal
Full Address

Dear (name of Principal),

I am writing to request a meeting to discuss a change in class placement for (full name of your child). He/she is currently in (grade/school/name of teacher). I feel he/she would do better in (name of alternative placement).

I am most concerned about (Keep this paragraph brief and mention your child's needs, not problems with people).

I would also like to have (name of teacher(s) and/or any specialists you would like) attend.

I (or my husband/wife and I) can arrange to meet with you on (days) between (give a range of time, such as between 3:00 and 5:00). Please let me know what time would be best for you.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. My daytime telephone number is (000) 000-0000. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely yours,

Your full name

Sample Letter 5: Request for Records

Q: *What might be some reasons to request copies of records?*

A: School records contain valuable information about your child's strengths and areas of need. These records can provide a formal system of communication between the professionals at your child's school and other professionals who need this information.

Here are some reasons that may motivate you to request copies of the records:

- It's always a good idea to review your child's school records to be sure they are correct and contain all necessary information.
- When your family is moving to a new school district, records may need to be sent.
- When you're taking your child for an independent evaluation, copies of past records may be useful.
- Services or other programs your child attends, like camp, tutors, or in-hospital schools, may find these useful in designing their activities.
- Postsecondary programs may need to see copies of your child's records.
- For your home files, especially if your child is finishing school.

Today's Date (include
month, day, and year)

Your Full Return Address

Name of Principal
Full Address

Dear (name of Principal),

I am writing to schedule a time to come to school and review all of my child's records, both cumulative and confidential. My child's name is ..., his/her grade is ..., and his/her teacher is ... I will also need copies of all or some of these records.

Please let me know where and when I can come in to see them. (I need these records by ...). You can reach me during the day at (your daytime phone number).

I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Your full name

Sample Letter 6: Request for an Independent Educational Evaluation at Public Expense

Q: *What might be some reasons for requesting an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at public expense?*

A: It is not uncommon for families to feel that their child may need additional tests or feel that the school's testing results did not accurately describe the child. Parents may want additional medical examinations or may be interested in areas the school staff did not test. You can, therefore, always have your child tested outside the school system.

However, if you expect the school to pay for an IEE, then you will need to request this **BEFORE** any independent testing is done. Some reasons the school may accept financial responsibility for an independent evaluation include:

- The original evaluation was incorrect;
- The original evaluation was not done in your child's native language;
- The original evaluation was incomplete and additional tests are needed;
- The evaluation could not be done with the needed accommodations, for example in braille or administered by someone who signs.

	Today's Date (include month, day, and year)
	Your Full Return Address
Name of Director of Special Education Full Address	
Dear (name of Director),	
My son/daughter, (give full name), who is currently attending (name of school, grade, teacher) was evaluated for special education services (give month and year of this evaluation). I am writing to inform you that I disagree with the testing, and I would like to have my child re-evaluated. I am requesting an Independent Educational Evaluation at public expense, for the following reasons:	
[briefly list your reason(s), being very specific].	
I would like this Independent Educational Evaluation to be done as soon as possible. Please send me copies of the school's guidelines for this. My daytime telephone number is (000) 000-0000.	
Sincerely yours,	
Your full name	

The school may disagree with your reasons for wanting additional testing. They may feel they have conducted the necessary tests in a proper manner. If the school disagrees with your request for an IEE at public expense, and you still feel the IEE is necessary and that they should accept financial responsibility, you can request a due process hearing.

Sample Letter 7: Request for a Due Process Hearing

Q: *When and how should I initiate due process procedures?*

A: While the school system may readily comply with your request to evaluate, re-evaluate, or meet to review the IEP, that doesn't necessarily mean that you will get the outcome you want. At the meeting you requested to discuss changing your child's placement the school system may not agree with you. They may feel that your child is in the most appropriate placement. Or at the IEP meeting you request in order to change the goal(s), add services, the school may not want to make these changes or additions because they believe that they are not in your child's best interest or are not appropriate.

If the school staff has communicated its thoughts and you have communicated yours and you both understand but disagree, you may want to consult with specialists, a mediator, or other persons to try to compromise. Remember: The goal is to provide an appropriate education for your child. There are many options on what is an appropriate education, and some trial and error may be necessary to develop a successful program for each student.

Sometimes compromise and further discussion do not lead to agreement between parties, and you may want to request a due process hearing. A due process hearing is a formal proceeding where the differences between you and the school system are shared in front of a qualified, impartial hearing officer. The hearing officer's role, after hearing both your side and the school's side, is to make a reasonable decision based on the information presented.

Your letter requesting a hearing should be sent to the person in charge of due process hearings. This may be the Superintendent of Schools or the Director of Special Education, or another designated school official. Call the Director of Special Education in your school district to find out the name, title, and address of the person responsible and address your request to this individual. Your letter will then be given to a selected hearing officer. It is the hearing officer who will be responsible for establishing the date, time, and place of the hearing.

Today's Date (include
month, day, and year)

Your Full Return Address

Name and Title of Person you identified
Title
Full Address

Dear (full name),

I (or We), the parent(s) of (your child's full name), am (are) writing to request a due process hearing. (Your child's full name) is (age and date of birth) and is currently attending (name of school). He/she is in the (grade level/special education classroom).

I (we) have met with (names of school personnel involved in your meeting) in an effort to resolve our differences with my child's (IEP, placement, testing, or whatever) and have been unable to do so. We therefore request that a due process hearing be scheduled with an impartial hearing officer in order to have this disagreement settled.

Please advise me (us) as soon as possible as to the date and time of this hearing so that I (we) can make the necessary arrangements with work (or childcare) and with those people we wish to include in the hearing. My daytime telephone number is (000) 000-0000.

I (we) also request that this hearing be (open/closed) to persons other than those directly involved. (Name of child) will/will not attend the hearing.

Sincerely yours,

Your full name

*cc: (name of Principal)
(name of your advocate/attorney)

*"cc:" means that you are sending a copy of this letter to the people you list after the "cc:". Xerox the letter after you have signed it, and send a copy to each person you have listed.

Q: *What do I do when things break down?*

A: Hopefully everything will go relatively smoothly and this section can be ignored. Now and then things fall between the cracks or people don't see eye to eye, and then other steps can be taken, if desired.

Once you have written a letter requesting an evaluation, an independent educational evaluation at public expense, an IEP review, a meeting of any kind, or a hearing, you should get a response from the school system either by telephone or in writing, within a reasonable period of time. In some cases, "reasonable" is defined, but in other cases, the timelines are not exact. So be reasonable. But if you feel too much time has passed without receiving a response to your letter, then call and ask if your letter of request has been received. If you are sure the school has received your letter (some parents send their letter of request by certified or registered mail), then ask when you can expect to hear from them. More than likely, when you call you

will talk to a secretary or administrative assistant. Ask that the superintendent, principal, or teacher call you back.

If your request still goes unanswered then you may want to write again. It would be useful to enclose a copy of the original request with this letter. Be sure not to send your only copy; remember, you will always need to have a copy for your records.

Sample Letter 8: Follow-up Letter

	Today's Date (include month, day, and year)
	Your Full Return Address
Name of Person to whom you wrote Full Address	
Dear (name),	
I wrote to you on (date) and also called to make sure you had received my letter. I left a message for you to call me back, but since I have not heard from you, I thought it best to write again.	
I am writing to request and have enclosed a copy of my first letter.	
I expect to hear from you within the next few days. My daytime telephone number is (000) 000-0000.	
Sincerely yours,	
Your full name	

If problems continue, there are additional steps which can be taken. If you feel your child's needs are not being met even after the due process hearing, there are very specific ways of addressing this. There are people you can contact to discuss the most effective next steps. In many cases, this may involve legal or other professional help and requires more in-depth and individual attention than can be covered in this *Parent's Guide*.

You can contact the Protection and Advocacy Agency for your state or the Parent Training and Information Project for further information. Both are listed on NICHCY's *State Resource Sheet*. You can also write or call NICHCY, and ask for assistance.

Conclusion

Writing letters is an important part of communication. As your son or daughter goes through the school years there may be many occasions to send letters. In advocating for your child's needs it is important to be able to say what you want in a short and to-the-point written document.

By communicating your thoughts, ideas, and concerns you will be defining your child's needs. By emphasizing the positive aspects of your child's educational experience you will develop a good working relationship with the professionals in your child's life. By being able to express what would work rather than by spending time and energy reviewing what didn't work, you will become a strong advocate for your child.

When goals are well defined and needs are clearly stated, success is possible.

A Final Word

Once you've begun to write letters, be sure to write when things are going well too! If a program, teacher, therapist, or other school staff member has provided an excellent opportunity for your child: Write a letter. We all like compliments and encouragement. Positive feedback is what keeps good programs running well. Just as you want to know "how it's going" so does the school staff.

Good communication, good team work, and effective school programs and policies take work. There's an old saying that states, "Things can go wrong all by themselves, but you have to work to make things go right."

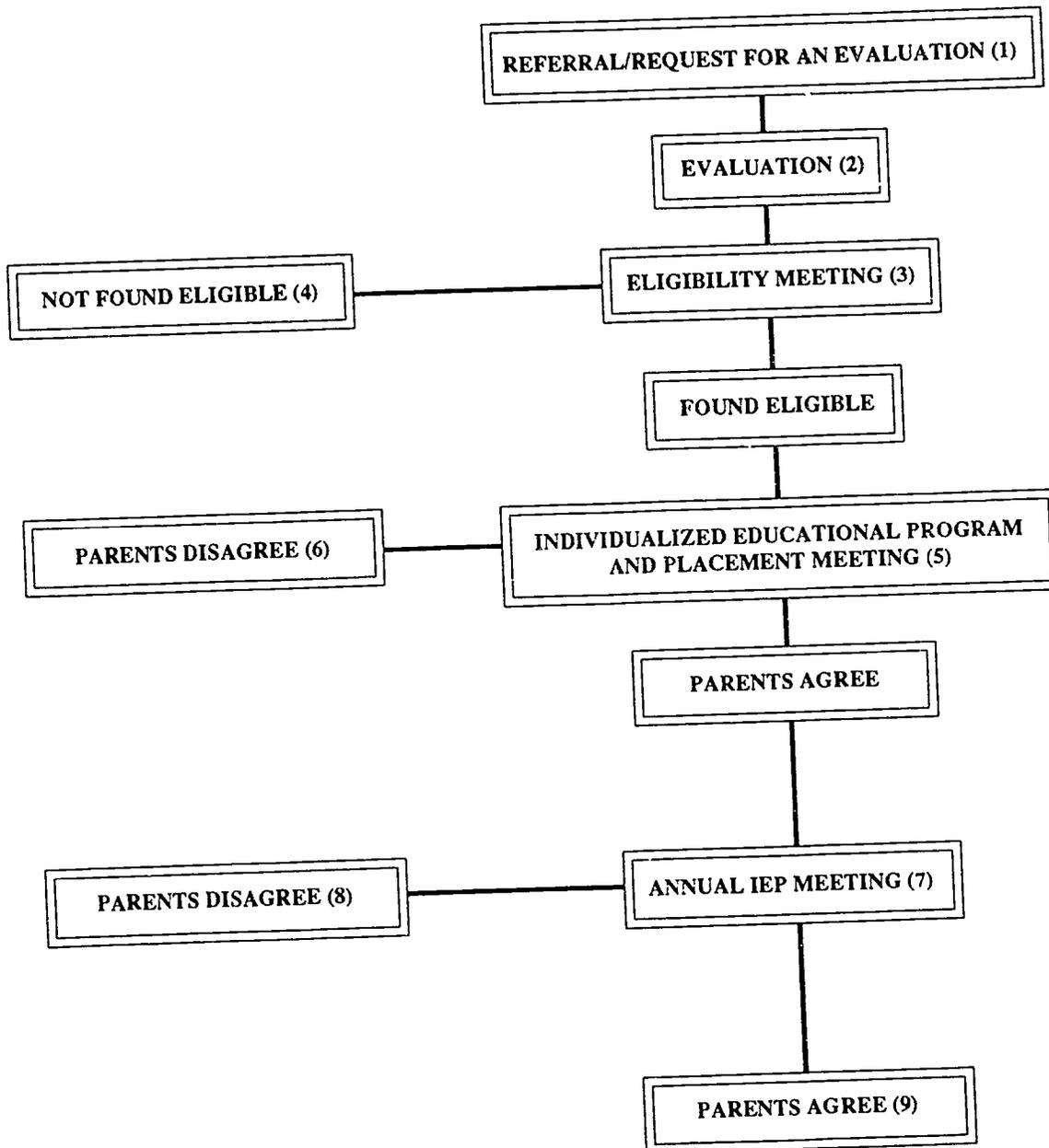
Be sure your teacher(s), principal, and superintendent hear from you when things are going right too.

Sample Letter 9: Positive Feedback Letter

	Today's Date (include month, day, and year)
	Your Full Return Address
Name of Teacher, Principal, or Superintendent Full Address	
Dear (name of person),	
I am writing to let you know that I am very pleased with (full name of your child's) special education program.	
(First name of your child) has had great success with (briefly say what went right and name the professionals working with your child).	
We look forward to continuing progress. Thank you for all your efforts on behalf of my child. My daytime telephone number is (000) 000-0000.	
Sincerely yours,	
Your full name	
cc: (Be sure the Principal of the school and/or Director of Special Education get a copy).	

THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESS

This chart shows the order of events from identification of a disability through development of an IEP. For a description of each stage, refer to the corresponding numbers on the following page.



The following statements correspond with the numbers represented on the flow chart on the preceding page.

- (1) This can be made by parents or a professional. If a professional requests an evaluation, then the school or service provider must notify parents in writing.
- (2) Parent permission is needed for the initial evaluation. The evaluation must assess the child in several areas.
- (3) The results of the evaluation are reviewed by a team of school personnel involved in educating students with special needs. This team usually includes a school psychologist, a teacher, a therapist, a special education supervisor, and/or administrator and others. Parents may be invited to attend this meeting. At the eligibility meeting it is determined whether or not the child is eligible for special services.
- (4) The child will stay in his/her current placement. Parents can disagree with the eligibility decision and have the right to take their child for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). They can request the school system to pay for this IEE if they feel the initial evaluation was not properly done.
- (5) Parents must be invited to attend this meeting. At this meeting the child's special education program is written. The IEP includes the goals and objectives of the child's program, types of specialized services that may be needed, and the amount and time he/she will spend in regular education activities.

Where the IEP is to be implemented is also determined at this meeting. This is known as the placement. Placement must be in the least restrictive setting appropriate for the child. This is called LRE or Least Restrictive Environment. Placement could be in the regular classroom with needed support services, a resource room for a specified amount of time, a self-contained class, or a separate facility.

Parents have the right to agree or disagree with the IEP and proposed placement.

- (6) Parents may discuss their concerns with the IEP team and try to work out a compromise. If they still disagree, parents can begin their Due Process Rights.
- (7) At an IEP meeting the child's progress is reviewed, the IEP is updated, and the child's placement is discussed. Parents must be invited to attend. Parents can make suggestions for changes, agree or disagree with the IEP goals, and agree or disagree with the placement. This meeting must take place at least once a year. Parents or school personnel can request an IEP and placement review at any time.
- (8) Parents can discuss their concerns with the special education staff and review team. There are several options, including additional testing, an independent evaluation, or other activities which are in keeping with parents' Due Process Rights.
- (9) The child will continue in the special education program with the updated IEP. There will be an IEP review each year and an in-depth re-evaluation at least every three years.

Additional Resources Available From NICHCY

The following materials are available from NICHCY. They may be helpful to you in gaining a better understanding of the special education process, laws, and how to access services in your area. All of these materials are available free of charge.

Questions and Answers About How to Get Special Education Services for Your Child.

Individualized Education Programs (IEP).

NEWS DIGEST: The Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities: What do the Laws Say? (Volume I, Number 1.)

NEWS DIGEST: Procedural Safeguards Ensuring that Handicapped Children Receive a Free Appropriate Public Education. (Number 7.)

Help for Special Children. (An easy-to-read booklet, on the law, available in English and Spanish.)

To order, contact NICHCY:

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