

Education Guide

Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living

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How to Use this Guide

Centers for Independent Living (CIL's) were started in the late 1970s, to establish a non-residential center to support people with disabilities, live their independent lives. It took a while for this grassroots effort, known as the Independent Living Movement, to find its way into all 50 states and the US Commonwealth; but we are here, and we are a strong service!

Illinois was one of the first adaptors of the Independent Living Movement, in the early 1980's. Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living (NICIL) is one of the original five (5) CIL's in Illinois.

Fast forward 35-plus years and today, NICIL, as well as 21 other CIL's, continue to work hard every day to develop programming and services that support our consumers, in the five (5) county-NICIL territory which includes: Carroll, Jo Daviess, Lee, Ogle, and Whiteside Counties. Our time is dedicated to serving all people with disabilities to live their independent lives, as they see fit. It is an honor and a privilege to serve!

Our services are tailored to each individual with whom we work. There are some common barriers which keep individuals from living independently. These barriers (or topics) are referred to in the industry as issue areas. There are nine (9) issue areas:

- Assistive Technology
- Attitudinal Barriers
- Communication
- Education
- Employment
- Healthcare Services
- Housing
- Physical Barriers
- Transportation

All NICIL staff are trained to be subject matter experts in these issue areas. Our team has developed issue-area guides to be available to our consumers, which are user friendly. These guides are designed to provide a basic understanding of the issue area, as well as to give information for self-direction. However, we want to be part of the process of independent living, so please, contact our team for one-on-one (individual) services.

Please use this guide to give you a helping hand in understanding the Education issue area and use the resources provided as a starting point. When you are ready, know that we are here to support your independent living path.

Check out our website, www.nicil.org for access to all of our issue area guides. Contact the office at 815-625-7860 or via email at frontdesk@nicil.org to request for a copy to be emailed to you. Enjoy!

Introduction

Get an education! You have to have an education to be employable! This is what children hear from the minute they begin school, however, how they hear this varies with their age. The biggest misconception about education is that once you obtain a job, or the career of your choice, that there is no more need for education. This is false, we are all constantly learning!

The NICIL Education Guide is an overview of different types of education, from the traditional primary, secondary, post-secondary school settings to adult learning opportunities. Our education guide is far from exclusive, as there are educational opportunities popping up daily, but sometimes these educational requirements and opportunities are difficult to navigate, this is where we may be able to help!

Navigating the special education system is understandably stressful! There are a number of acronyms and laws that complicate understanding. The NICIL team works to remain current with any and all laws and process changes in order to assist and guide our consumers. Our primary purpose is to help parents and students better understand their rights within the special education system. We also work to coach and mentor parents and students in how to best communicate, and/or advocate, to be their own or their child's best advocate!

Overwhelmed? Not sure how to get started? First things, first! Understand that this will take time and effort on your part, guided by NICIL. Read this guide, understand what you need to be successful, then call us for an appointment. We will be waiting!

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Definitions

There are often times that people use language (slang or abbreviations) that may not make any sense to those not familiar with a specific topic. In this section we want to take the time to identify some common terms that you may come across working with education.

Special Education – Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) – A written statement for each child that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with special education law. An IEP is a legal document

504 Plan – A plan for students with disabilities who do not require specialized instruction but need the assurance that they will receive equal access to public education and services. This document is created to outline their specific accessibility requirements. Students with 504 Plans do not require specialized instruction, but, like the IEP, a 504 Plan should be updated annually to ensure that the student is receiving the most effective accommodations for his/her specific circumstances.

Transition Plan is an IEP requirement; designed to facilitate movement from school to workplace or to higher education.

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) – A plan of positive behavioral interventions in the IEP of a child whose behaviors interfere with his/her learning or that of others.

Eligibility – To be eligible for special education services, a child must have a disability and be in need of special education and related services.

Inclusion – An effort to make sure students with disabilities go to school with their friends and neighbors, while also receiving the “specially designed instruction and support” they need to achieve high standards and succeed as learners.

Evaluation – Procedures used to determine whether a child has a disability as well as the nature and extent of the special education and related services that the child needs.

Accommodations – Changes in how test is administered that do not substantially alter what the test measures; includes changes in presentation format, response formation, test setting, or test timing. Appropriate accommodations are made to level the playing field, i.e. to provide equal opportunity to demonstrate knowledge.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – Legal requirement to educate children with disabilities in general education classrooms with children who are not disabled to the maximum extent possible.

These are only a few of the many different definitions that you will encounter in your life as related to education. Take the time to be prepared! It will be worth every minute!

Special Education

The special education system in Illinois is designed to provide eligible students with disabilities an education with their peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Although this sounds pretty simple, understanding and navigating the special education system can be very stressful. The following is a simple guide to requesting special education services, evaluation, and eligibility for said services.

There are many ways in which parents learn of IEP's and special education related services that may benefit a student. These may include recommendations from a pediatrician, counselor, teacher, even other parents. Keep in mind, no situation is the same and just because one student obtains these services does not mean that all students will, regardless of similarities and diagnoses. Second point to keep in mind, a medical diagnosis does not mean that a student will qualify for an IEP. Eligibility is determined based on the effect a disability has on the student's ability to learn with their peers.

The request for evaluation for special education services must be submitted in writing to the principal of the student's school. A relevant request will be followed with evaluations to determine the impact of a student's disability on their education. The evaluation must be completed within 60 school days. The student will be evaluated in all areas that may be affected by the diagnosis or disability. There are 14 disability categories or special education eligibility categories that a student may be evaluated in for the provision and development of an IEP. These categories are:

- Autism
- Cognitive Disability
- Deaf-blindness
- Deafness
- Developmental Delay
- Emotional Disability
- Hearing Impairments
- Intellectual Disability
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment

Should the evaluation for services determine that a student is eligible for an IEP and related services, a meeting will be scheduled to develop the IEP. This is a meeting for the IEP team to determine necessary services and lay out the plan to provide these

services, including goals, supplementary aids, accommodations, etc. For this meeting the IEP team includes all persons involved in the evaluations conducted in the determination process, the parents, and various members of the student's school. This meeting must be completed within 30 school days from the date determined eligible for services.

Once the IEP is laid out, it must be revisited and updated, at least annually. The student must be reevaluated for services at least every three (3) years. Should concerns arise between annual review meetings, an IEP meeting may be requested, in writing, by the parents or any member of the IEP team. Should there be decline in abilities due to disability or new diagnoses new evaluation for services may be requested, in writing, at any point. Please remember, medical diagnoses do not necessarily equate to special education services or additional accommodations. The IEP team does must consider the test results and recommendations from outside evaluators, doctors, etc., but the team is not required to comply with the outside requests.

Once a student with an IEP reaches the age of 14½ a transition plan must be included in the IEP. This transition plan is a student specific plan that identifies student goals for after high school, whether it be vocational or post-secondary education. The transition plan should include a plan for reaching the student's after high school goals. Please keep in mind that the IEP team, including parents, need to be realistic with the student to ensure that the transition plan includes a goal or goals that the student can actually reach. Not being realistic with the student will only impede progress and success for the student.

Should a student have disability related behaviors that affect their education and the education of those students around them a behavior plan may be developed and included in the IEP. The behavior plan should lay out a plan for addressing behaviors, motivations, strategies for implementing replacement behaviors, environment options/changes, skills training to assist student in learning coping skills. An evaluation termed Functional Behavior Assessment may be needed to identify the purpose that a student's behavior serves.

Tips for Parents

Parents are a crucial part of their student's IEP team. For many parents, IEP meetings cause a great deal of stress and agitation. The following tips can help parents be better prepared, therefore reducing the stress of attending meetings.

1. Request a draft copy of the IEP at least one (1) week prior to the scheduled meeting. Although the IEP is officially assembled during the scheduled meeting, much time and work is put in to the assembly of a thorough plan prior to the meeting. Parents have the right to review all information that has been entered into the draft document in order to be better prepared for the meeting.
2. Parental Concerns – There is a section of the IEP entitled parental concerns that is designated for the parents to identify any and all concerns and questions that

they may have regarding their student's education. NICIL recommends that parents draft out all concerns, whether typed or hand written, and bring to the meeting. When reaching the portion of the meeting where the parental concerns are addressed, provide the document and ask that it be attached to the IEP. This allows the concerns, in the exact words of the parents to be attached to the IEP.

- a. Reminder – the IEP is a legal document
3. Be Organized – have a method of collecting and organizing all documents, notes, and records that pertain to the student's IEP.
4. Communicate in Writing Only – keep all communication with the school and IEP in writing, i.e. e-mail. E-mail correspondence keeps a running log of all communication between the parents and the school. Written communication provides a reference for all parties to ensure that all parties remain on the same page for the benefits of the student
5. Don't Be Afraid to Ask – As in many fields, special education is packed full of acronyms and terminology that may not be understood by all. Parents must ask for explanation or clarification in order to fully understand the discussions and be a more fully active member of the student's IEP team.
6. Review Procedural Safeguards regularly – this is a document that is provided to parents at the first IEP meeting and offered at each corresponding IEP meeting throughout a student's educational career. Parents should review this document regularly to ensure full understanding.

Transition Timeline

Timelines are a familiar topic for parents. There are a number of timelines that are used by parents for determining a variety of milestones for children. Growth and development timelines are the most familiar to all parents. The Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services assembled the following timeline as a parental guide to transition for students. This timeline should be used beginning in elementary school as a guide.

Elementary School

- *Introduce the concept of work into everyday activities*
- *Students should become familiar with all types of careers*
- *Develop self-care and daily living skills routines*
- *Focus on human relationships and develop good social skills at home and school*
- *Explore vocational opportunities at the upper grade levels that are available*
- *Make your child a productive part of the household, introduce chores and an allowance*
- *Explore self-advocacy information and community advocacy organizations that are available. You might need additional support at some point in time*
- *Ensure that accessibility issues or adaptive equipment (i.e. communication, wheelchairs) needs are being addressed*
- *Request information on Public Law 105-17, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and regulation updates. These are good resources.*

Middle School Age

- *Begin career exploration, watch movies, read books, go to work with adults, etc.*
- *Support the teacher's efforts to provide job training as part of the school program*
- *Find out the types of educational program options such as inclusion, vocational, combination, etc.*
- *At home, parents can also help their children explore careers by performing chores around the house, volunteering in the community, and participating in community projects*

14 Years Old

- *Determine transition needs*
- *Complete questionnaires, surveys and interest inventories*
- *Explore recreation and leisure interests*
- *Discuss medical needs and therapies*
- *Consider needs and when appropriate, develop independent living skills*
- *Begin early career exploration*
- *Explore summer programs and employment options*
- *Increase self-advocacy skills via training*
- *Complete IEP and transition plans*
- *Develop post-secondary goals*
- *Complete PUNS (Priority of Urgency of Needs for Services updates for students with intellectual disabilities)*
- *Utilize PAS (Pre-admission Screening Agents), available with local communities*
- *Promote person-centered planning*
- *Encourage student participation in IEP's*
- *Encourage parent and service provider participation in IEP meetings*
- *Explore transportation needs*
- *Review course of study for high school*

15 years old

- *Promote student participation in career events*
- *Initiate referrals to relevant state and community agencies*
- *Explore residential programming options, as appropriate*
- *Determine transportation/mobility training needs*
- *Explore case management needs*
- *Discuss residential programs/waiting list processes*
- *Determine appropriateness for referrals to school to work programs*
- *Explore summer programs and employment opportunities*
- *Explore current and future living options*
- *Encourage parent and service provider's participation in IEP meetings*
- *Review high school course of study*

- *Discuss potential for Supplemental Social Security (SSI) and Social Security Working Incentives (SSWI)*
- *Explore needs for home services and assistive technology*
- *Review/revise Transition Plans and services, as applicable*

16 Years Old

- *Participate in interest/vocational inventory (self-directed search)*
- *Discuss supported employment and job coaching*
- *Complete work rating scale*
- *Access career counseling and job shadowing*
- *Consider work training and post-secondary education options*
- *Obtain driver's license or state ID-card*
- *Introduce concepts of guardianship, power of attorney, will/trust*
- *Explore summer program and employment options*
- *Review high school course of study*
- *Make referral to appropriate community agencies*
- *Invite service providers to IEP meetings*
- *Review transition goals in the IEP and revise, if necessary*

17 Years Old

- *Obtain functional vocational evaluations*
- *Enroll in vocational education classes*
- *Discuss taxes and medical insurance*
- *Investigate financial aid resources*
- *Establish graduation date*
- *Visit vocational, educational, and residential options*
- *Register for a complete ACT or SAT testing, if appropriate*
- *Invite service providers to IEP meetings*
- *Review high school course of study*
- *Apply to and visit post-secondary educational programs*
- *Review Transition Plan in the IEP and revise if necessary*

18 Years Old

- *Apply for post-secondary vocation services for colleges, trade schools, and training centers*
- *Explore apprenticeship, job shadowing, mentoring programs*
- *Explore options for accessing therapy/counseling and/or other community agency services*
- *Referral to adult service providers and include transition planning meetings*
- *Confirm student's legal status for self-representation*
- *Apply for income support (SSI), public aid (Medicaid), and general assistance*
- *Consider guardianship, power of attorney, wills, and trusts 3 months before eighteenth birthday*

- *Register to vote and for Selective Services*
- *Secure high school records for planning/services*
- *Contact case management agency that coordinates funding for in-home and resident supported living in the community, if appropriate*
- *Complete Summary of Performance if exiting high school*

19-22

- *Identify and access recreation/leisure options*
- *Actively participate in post-secondary vocational services (colleges/trade schools) and employment*
- *Encourage active participation with adult service providers (for students remaining in school)*
- *Follow-up with referrals for services from adult service providers*
- *Investigate and/or confirm day programs and workshops*
- *Investigate post-secondary education with follow up services*
- *Apply for Medicaid, if appropriate*
- *Pursue Adult Education*
- *Systematically phase out school supports, phase in adult services*
- *Invite service providers to IEP meetings*
- *Review high school course of study*
- *Complete Summary of Performance if exiting school*

Not Eligible for an IEP

Should a student be determined not eligible for an IEP, a 504 plan may be an option. A 504 plan is a plan for students with disabilities who do not require specialized instruction but need the assurance that they will receive equal access to public education and services. This document is created to outline their specific accessibility requirements. Students with 504 Plans do not require specialized instruction, but, like the IEP, a 504 Plan should be updated annually to ensure that the student is receiving the most effective accommodations for his/her specific circumstances. Although not required to be in written format, NICIL recommends that it be done in writing for reference as well as legal applications.

Resources

Wright, P.W.D, Wright, P.D., O'Connor, S.W. (2009). *All About IEP's*. Virginia: Harbor House Law Press INC.

Wright, P.W.D, Wright, P.D. (2006). *Special Education Law Second Edition*. Virginia: Harbor House Law Press INC.

Educational Rights and Responsibilities: Understanding Special Education in Illinois;
<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/ch4-eligibility.pdf>

Northern Illinois Transition Planning Resource Guide. (2018).

Conclusion

There are an abundance of time frames, requirements, and procedures involved in the obtaining and maintaining of special education and related services in Illinois. This guide is meant to be a basic introduction to some of these services. We intend this guide to be of assistance in beginning the conversation with your student's school. We would be honored to discuss your unique situation in greater depth. Call us for an appointment, we will be waiting!

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