

Questions to ask your school and/or AEA if your child is behind in reading

These are appropriate if your child is receiving intervention in general or special education.

- What is the name of the reading intervention/program/curriculum being used with my child?
- What skills does this program work on? Why was it chosen for my child? (If your child has an IEP, the instruction should be individualized to their areas of difficulty.)
- What are the fidelity requirements of the program (ie frequency and duration of lessons, teacher training)? Are you doing the program with fidelity? If not, why do you expect progress if the program is not being done as it was intended?
- What evidence can you provide that it is effective for children with dyslexia?
- When and how often are my child's interventions or special education services taking place?
- Is my child receiving 1:1 services, small group, or both? How many children are in the group?
- Who is giving the instruction?
- Is my child taken out of the general education classroom? If so, for how long?
- How is my child's progress being monitored? How often is this done?
- If my child continues to make this rate of progress, when will my child catch up to peers and be reading at a proficient level for his or her grade? (Remember that making progress is not enough – the goal is to close the gap.)
- If your child has an IEP: At what grade level and/or percentile has my child's goal been set? Make sure this is on par with his or her intelligence, i.e. a bright child should not have a goal set at the 25th percentile. In addition, guidance from the U.S. Department of Education states that children's goals should be set so they are working towards grade-level standards.
- If your child has an IEP: What kind of technology is written into my child's IEP? (Federal IDEA allows technology to be included.)

Questions to ask if your child has been found ineligible for special education

Iowa law and federal IDEA state that *multiple sources of data* about a child should be considered when making special education decisions. In addition, when a Specific Learning Disability is suspected, the IDEA requires a classroom observation.

- Was my child observed in the general education classroom? Were the observations discussed by the IEP team and documented in the AEA's evaluation report?
- Was my child's general education teacher interviewed? Was his or her feedback discussed by the IEP team and documented in the AEA's evaluation report?
- If other people work with my child at school, were they interviewed? Was their feedback discussed and documented?
- If you provided any outside evaluation reports to the school and AEA, were these reports read and discussed by the IEP team? Was this documented on the AEA's evaluation report? If not, why not?
- Is there a summary or a description of the results of any outside evaluations on the report? Were any of the private evaluators contacted and interviewed?

Advocacy and Meeting Tips

- You have the right to obtain a copy of your child's records from the school and the AEA at any time. Make these requests in writing. You may need to make separate requests to the AEA and the school.
- Keep a written log of all communications you have about your child's services. Document the date and time, the person or people you interacted with, the mode of communication (phone, email, in person), a brief summary of what was discussed, any actions agreed upon and who is responsible.
- Send a follow-up email after meetings and phone calls to confirm what was discussed and agreed to. (For example, it was good to talk with you today, Mrs. X. Today you said that my son Johnny would be able to do ____ from now on, is that correct?)
- Ask questions to your school and AEA in writing, even if there is a meeting planned to discuss them. Mail or email your questions in a dated letter ahead of time. Ask for a written response, though you may not receive one.
- Consider audio recording school meetings. It is respectful to inform ahead of time that you will be recording. The school and/or AEA may bring their own recorder. Temi is an app that provides quick transcripts of audio files.
- Many parents report feeling flustered during meetings. Bring a friend or family member with you for support. Talk with them ahead of time about what you'd like from them.
- Remember that you don't have to do all of your advocating during the meeting. If you make requests and they are denied or there is resistance, use the meeting as a time to gather as much information you can about the school's position. Ask lots of open-ended questions – like tell me more about that, is that a district wide policy, is that in writing anywhere, how does that fit in with the law on IEPs/504 plans? Then listen and record.
- If your child has an IEP, and you make requests for services and/or supports that are denied, be sure you receive a written "Prior Written Notice" document for your requests. This is your receipt. It is required by law and must state what you asked for, that it was denied, and why.