Transitioning to a new school, especially when moving up to middle or high school can be difficult for any child. However, for a student with an IEP, the transition can be exponentially harder. In addition to the anxiety your child may feel about the transition, a brand new team of teachers will need to interpret and execute their IEP in a new setting, all while getting to know your child. As you prepare for this critical transition, TECA recommends that you consider the following tips to help pave the way for a smoother process that will allow your child to more easily adapt to and progress in their new setting and help their teachers get to know them.

Don’t Take Anything for Granted

Think about all the things your child’s current teachers do for them that are NOT included in their IEP. There will be quite a few items on that list. This is because teachers learn more about your child as they work with them and may implement new strategies along the way, such as providing one or more breaks at particular times during the school day, or implementing a specific teaching method. Additionally, there may be strategies or systems that your child’s teachers provide to all students, and while typical students may benefit from them, your child may critically depend on those provisions. Such provisions may include the ability to hand in assignments digitally, the use of a computer for written work, or online access to the curriculum. All of these accommodations should be written on your child’s IEP so that their new school can appropriately prepare to support them.
Be Proactive In Providing Information

When your child graduates and moves up to middle or high school, don’t expect, or assume that the new school will receive your child’s IEP in time for the start of the school year. We suggest that you be proactive and provide them with a copy of the IEP prior to the start of the school year. Pair that with an email or phone call requesting a mutually convenient time to discuss your child’s needs. Such meetings could be held any time between June and September, so try reaching out before the end of the current school year with your request. You may also want to ask for a one-page letter of introduction about your child from your child’s current teacher(s) to pass along to their new teachers. We recommend you do that before graduation. Your child’s new school will be appreciative, especially if you suspect that your child will have a difficult transition to the new school setting.

When Specials Aren’t Special

In many schools, there are orientation programs to welcome and prepare new students for the challenges ahead. These programs, while well-intentioned, are often considered “special” and therefore school administrators may forget to provide special education supports for this type of programming, including social-emotional supports that are on a student’s IEP. Twice exceptional students who rely on routine may find such special programs overwhelming or challenging to access. Whenever you are aware of such events, talk to your school in advance and ask them how they will make accommodations to ensure that your child will have their support so that they are able to participate in and benefit from such programs.

What’s the takeaway? Don’t assume anything about what will happen at your child’s new school. Understand that you may be the only person to be raising such issues. However, your advocacy will not only help your child, but will likely be assisting teachers to facilitate a smooth and successful transition.

ABOUT JENN CHOI

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