Did You Survive Your Annual Review/IEP Meeting? – Indicators of a Good IEP Meeting!

It’s Annual Review/IEP season and frustration is in the wind. Despite the difficulties parents often experience, IEP meetings can be very positive and productive. Many of us experience this much less then we would like, but here are some things that I have experienced recently that are indicators of a positive process (and even outcomes) in IEP meetings:

1) You knew most of the people at the meeting and they knew you.
2) More importantly, most of the staff at the meeting actually knew your child and had a good idea of his/her functioning.
3) Even better, the staff conveyed a genuine interest and concern about your child and had real positive comments about them.
4) You knew what the meeting was going to be about and the agenda and that was what actually was discussed.
5) Staff informed you in advance of any important information that was new or different.
6) You were given a draft IEP to review in advance and/or had the chance to talk with the staff about possible needs, goals, objectives and services before the meeting.
7) The meeting was set based on a time that worked for you as well as the school.
8) The staff provided actual data about your child’s progress that made sense and showed what was happening over the year.
9) You were able to ask questions and get good explanations, and didn’t feel that you were imposing or the staff was getting defensive.
10) The staff referred to you by name, not as “mom” or “dad.”
11) Any written reports or written drafts were distributed prior to or at the beginning of the meeting, so you could follow along.
12) The staff didn’t spend the first half (or more) of the meeting reading the reports that were already written, but provided clear summaries and discussed your child as a real person, not just as a set of scores or as if they were a scientific subject or a stranger.
13) The staff invited your concerns, comments and suggestions and had open discussion about them.
14) There was an honest and open discussion about areas of progress and difficulty, as well as ways to improve programming for the coming year.
15) You were given clear information about any tests or data being discussed and about the different options for programming or choices about services, classes, etc. Your child's input was also requested and valued.
16) Ongoing communication and mutual information sharing was invited and supported, not just at the meeting, but throughout the year.
17) The information the school shared about your child's progress (or lack of progress) fit with your own impressions – you were all talking about the same kid.
18) Your child was making real and meaningful progress in ways that were not just in small increments from the prior year, but enough to actually make a difference in his/her ability to function day to day in the real world.
19) Where problems were identified, the team, including you, focused on how to overcome them, not on what “couldn't be done” or was not permitted or affordable.
20) At the end of the meeting, the IEP document was clear, measurable and something you or anyone else could understand and would know how to interpret and provided an accurate picture of your child’s strengths and challenges and the plans for dealing with them.
21) The planning included consideration for how your child could participate more in regular class or typical activities as much as possible, with appropriate support to promote success.
22) If there wasn't enough time, another meeting was planned in order to insure that all issues were adequately addressed, without anyone giving you the message that further discussion wasn't possible or was burdensome.
23) Where there were problems, the blame game didn’t start.
24) Your child is feeling positively about school and the meeting ended with you and the staff feeling like a team working together to achieve even more progress. The feeling was not “us” vs. “them,” but “we.”