

It's Okay

By Nancy Bowden, Director of Individual Advocacy
Arc of Aurora | 720-213-1420

So no one showed. It's okay [you tell yourself]. You really do not want to inconvenience anyone nor do you want to be a bother or burden anyone. It is okay, you understand everyone is busy; you get it. It's okay.

It's okay that the _____ (you fill in the absentee) did not show for your child's Annual IEP meeting, Triennial and/or Re-Evaluation meeting. It's okay. You can chat with them next week. You can fill them in on the Team's discussion about your child's strengths, needs, goals, supports, accommodations, fears and everyday struggles. It's okay. You got this.

Why? Is it your job and/or your responsibility to fill in school and/or District personnel on what did or did not happen at your child's Annual IEP meeting, Triennial and/or Re-Evaluation meeting that they could not be bothered to attend? Is it your responsibility to continually take off work to go to the school and meet with just about each and every Special Education Teacher, General Education Teacher, School Resource Officer, lunch staff, classroom paras, Art Teacher, Gym Teacher, Music Teacher, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Vision Instructor, Mobility and Orientation Instructor, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Instructor, Speech and Language Pathologist, School Counselor, Dean, School Nurse, School Social Worker, School Psychologist, Assistant Principle and/or Principle? Is it your responsibility to take off work to have meetings with District level personnel such as the Special Education Consultants, Autism/Severe Needs Team, Brain Injury Team, Assistive Technology Team, Director of Special Education at the Elementary or Secondary level, General Education Directors and/or the Superintendent? To be all-inclusive, you have to give mention to Transportation, given all the time you chat with the driver and/or para about your child's transportation needs.

It is *not* your responsibility; it is theirs as teachers, instructors, itinerant staff, building Administrators, security, support staff, District level Administrators and transportation personnel's responsibility. Each and every one of them signed up for their respective role in the educational system, your local school. Yes, each and every one of them signed up for their respective jobs and received a clear and detailed description of their job duties, responsibilities and expectations.

As Public School personnel, each and every one of them has a duty and responsibility to you and your child. That duty and responsibility is to apply their expertise to identifying and meeting your child's needs and to be a contributing member in ensuring your child gets a Free Appropriate Public Education each and every school day. Their responsibility to you and your child is inclusive of attending and participating in your child's IEP meeting, Triennial and/or Re-Evaluation meeting from start to finish - **every time**. Each and every one of them brings to the meeting their own respective expertise and educational experience for which they were hired; they have a duty to help you better understand your child's unique needs and offer strategies to help your child reach their own individual potential. Why would you permit the meeting to proceed without them?

Look at it from a different perspective for a moment: imagine your child needs brain surgery to combat the relentless seizures your child is paralyzed by daily. The difficult and complex surgery is scheduled and the Surgical Team, including the surgeon, the surgeon's assistant, surgical nurses, the anesthesiologist, circulating nurse and surgical technologist received written notice of when and where

they are expected to report for your child's brain surgery. As your child is being rolled into the surgical unit, the surgeon matter-of-factly tells you that the anesthesiologist is running late and will join in when he/she can, and the circulating nurse will not be participating in your child's brain surgery, as she had other duties to attend to. "Almost forgot," the surgeon says, "two of the surgical nurses need to leave in about 20 minutes as they have to get back to other patients. It's okay," the surgeon says, "the surgical assistant will cover for them."

It is very unlikely that you would excuse the identified Surgical Team members and give your permission for the Surgeon to move forward with performing complex brain surgery on your child with critical team members running late, leaving early and/or not even participating. I am in no way making light of IEP's and/or brain surgery, but the underlining premise is the same, whether it is a Surgical Team or an IEP Team, it is imperative that all members of the team bring their respective expertise and knowledge of your child to the table...operating table or IEP table.

As per §300.321 IEP Team of the Federal Register, Part II Department of Education, 34 CFR Parts 300 and 301, August 14, 2006 defines an IEP Team as

(a) General. The public agency must ensure that the IEP Team for each child with a disability includes—

(1) The parents of the child;

(2) Not less than one regular education teacher of the child (if the child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment);

(3) Not less than one special education teacher of the child, or where appropriate, not less than one special education provider of the child;

(4) A representative of the public agency who—

(i) Is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of

children with disabilities;

(ii) Is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum; and

(iii) Is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the public agency.

(5) An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results, who may be a member of the team described in paragraphs (a)(2) through (a)(6) of this section;

(6) At the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise

regarding the child, including related services personnel as appropriate; and

(7) Whenever appropriate, the child with a disability it is their job to participate in your child's IEP, Triennial and Re-Evaluation. Go ahead, make it a burden and a bother for all the school folks by holding them responsible and accountable to you and your child. It's okay.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary on line defines Burden as something that is carried [load]; duty or responsibility.

Encarta Dictionary: English (North America) defines Burden (1) (transitive verb) give responsibility to somebody...to give somebody a task that is difficult to deal with...

Merriam-Webster Dictionary on line defines Bother as to take the time to do something; to make an effort to do something

Encarta Dictionary: English (North America) defines Bother (verb) as (1) make effort.

So go ahead, remind school personnel at all levels of their burden to attend and be a contributing participant in your child's IEP, Triennial and/or Re-Evaluation meeting *from start to finish*. It's okay. Go ahead, you should be adamant that school personnel bother to participate in your child's IEP, Triennial and/or Re-Evaluation meeting from start to finish, as **it is their burden**. It's okay.