

Six Questions Parents Should Ask at an ARD Meeting

What is the ARD?

An ARD (admission, review, and decision) committee is a group of people whose job is to design an individualized education plan (IEP) for each student who receives special education services. Parents are an important part of their student's committee, but because there are so many rules that govern special education, it can be difficult for parents to give the meaningful input they want to simply because it is so easy to get lost in the educational terms and the endless paperwork and regulations.

Many parents work very hard to learn about the special education process, but even those parents can find ARD meetings difficult. And for parents that have not had much opportunity to learn about their role, it can be almost impossible to come away from a meeting feeling like it went as well as it should have gone.

It is certainly helpful to have an understanding of special education law and educational strategies for your student's particular needs, but you don't have to know these things to make a positive impact on the development of the IEP for your student. As a parent, one of your primary goals at the committee meeting should be to make sure that a range of possibilities are considered based on the individual strengths of your student. The questions below are designed to prompt school personnel members of the ARD committee to think creatively about your student, without you, the parent, having to know a lot of technical information. You have the best personal knowledge of your student's strengths and weaknesses, and you have an overall goal in mind for your student, and these questions will help you pick the brains of those with educational training about how to best educate your student.

Six Questions for Parents to Use in the ARD Committee

Question 1. What would you need to make that happen?

This question is designed to be used in two different situations.

1. When you have asked about something that the district has told you can't be done, use this question to find out if there is anything that can feasibly be done to make it possible. Just because something isn't already being done, doesn't mean that it might not be pretty easy to make it happen.
2. When the committee is going to do something, this question is good to find out if there are preliminary steps that will need to be taken, like providing training, purchasing materials, or adding additional personnel. By asking this question, you can make sure that the preliminary steps are also written into the IEP and that a timeframe for completing the preliminary steps is discussed.

Question 2. What other ideas do you have?

This is a great question to use when the school staff seems to have already decided the entire IEP.

Question 3. Is there any person in the district that might have more information on this?

With only a few school staff on each ARD committee, there are bound to be people in the district with more experience and more expertise in many areas being discussed by the committee. Whenever you feel that more information would be helpful to deliberations, use this question and see if that person can be consulted or brought into the discussion.

Question 4. What training on this is available to these personnel?

Adequate training for personnel that work with your student is critical. Training may be on specific educational techniques or on working with particular disabilities. This is a good question to ask as a matter of routine, because you want regular training for all the staff working with your students, including classroom aides. Once it written into the IEP, the district is legally obligated to make sure the training is provided. Because classroom aides are often the people primarily engaged with your child, be sure to ask specifically about training for them. Many districts routinely do staff development training only with teachers.

Question 5. Where will that be written in the IEP?

If it's agreed to by the entire committee, it's a suggestion. If it's written down in the IEP, it's a mandate. However, because the paperwork for an IEP is extensive and complex, it is not always readily apparent whether something is actually in the IEP or not. Make sure you ask this question to be sure that it is not overlooked. Because of the complexity of the paperwork, things are sometimes unintentionally left out of the IEP, so it is always worthwhile to ask this question, even if you trust your ARD committee.

Question 6. Do we need more information before a decision can be reached? (and why, or why not?)

Pull this question out when you are interested in a particular service but the school is trying to talk you out of it. An ARD committee meeting can be adjourned by mutual agreement any time and as many times as necessary, so if there is more information to be gathered, the meeting can be rescheduled. This question is a good one to use to try and slow things down if they are going in a direction you disagree with. Asking the follow-up – why? Or why not? – will let you know if they are making a conscious recommendation, or if they are simply following the routine plan for special education students.

Although the law requires an individual education plan to be developed for each student based on that student's individual and unique needs, in reality schools generally set up programs and apply them to all students. For the most part, this is not necessarily bad, and may be the only way for the school to have resources to provide services to everyone who needs them. But sometimes, you do need to be very individual and these questions will help you keep the school on the right path.