

# A Guide to Organizing Your Paperwork

You have probably discovered that your child has an overwhelming amount of paperwork. This guide is just one way to organize it. There is no right or wrong way to organize your files; use a system that makes the most sense to you. Depending on the amount of paperwork you have, you may want to make each of these sections a separate binder.

## Evaluations and Testing Related to Your Child's Diagnosis

- Evaluations, reports and diagnoses from private therapists and professionals
- School observations from therapists and other professionals

## Medical

- Contact information for primary pediatrician
- Contact information for medical specialists
- Emergency Information Form
- Record of all surgeries
- Immunizations record
- Medical tests, including blood work, hearing and vision – list in alphabetical order by specialty (ENT, GI, MRI, Neurology, etc.)
- Calendar of appointments
- Questions for the doctor
- Referrals
- Medical insurance information

## Infants & Toddlers

- Calendar of visits
- Family visit notes and suggestions
- Evaluations
- Individualized Family Service plan (IFSP)
- Useful Information (provided by the teacher)
- Record of Contacts (Phone / email log)
- Questions for next visit

## Special Education / IEP

- Contact information for the school
- Current Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- Current planning notes for the IEP – include additional blank sheets to keep a running log of questions as you think of them
- Old IEPs and planning notes – make sure all are dated
- Current Extended School Year (ESY)
- Old ESY and ESY evaluations – dated
- Evaluations and reports by therapists and professionals
- Phone /email log

## Recreational Activities and Therapies

- Contact information for activities and therapies (sports teams, therapeutic horseback riding, swimming, etc.)
- Signed waivers for recreational activities
- Summer camp forms and contact information

## Legal

- Contact information for lawyer(s)
- Guardianship documents
- Disability Trust information/copies
- Special education – paperwork for mediation, due process, legal representation for IEP meetings, etc.
- Phone /email log

## Finance and Funding

- Contact information for your Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) and Social Security Income (SSI) representatives
- Copy of DDA funding application and associated paperwork
- Copy of SSI application and associated paperwork
- Contact information for agencies that provide Rolling Access Funds in your county
- Copy of Rolling Access Funds applications and associated paperwork
- Contact information for Autism Waiver
- Autism Waiver documents

*We would like to thank Partners for Success in Harford County for their contributions to this guide.*

## Emergency Information

### Insurance Information:

Insurance Name \_\_\_\_\_ Policy Holder \_\_\_\_\_  
Group Number \_\_\_\_\_ Plan Number \_\_\_\_\_  
Employer Name \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Insurance Phone Numbers \_\_\_\_\_  
Insurance Address \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Home Number \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Employer \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Social Security Number \_\_\_\_\_ Insurance ID \_\_\_\_\_  
Allergies \_\_\_\_\_ Medical Conditions \_\_\_\_\_  
Current Medication and Therapies \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Secondary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_

Father's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Home Number \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Employer \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Social Security Number \_\_\_\_\_ Insurance ID \_\_\_\_\_  
Allergies \_\_\_\_\_ Medical Conditions \_\_\_\_\_  
Current Medication and Therapies \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Secondary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_  
Social Security Number \_\_\_\_\_ Insurance ID \_\_\_\_\_  
Allergies \_\_\_\_\_  
Medical Conditions \_\_\_\_\_  
Current Medication and Therapies \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Secondary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_  
Social Security Number \_\_\_\_\_ Insurance ID \_\_\_\_\_  
Allergies \_\_\_\_\_  
Medical Conditions \_\_\_\_\_  
Current Medication and Therapies \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Secondary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_  
Social Security Number \_\_\_\_\_ Insurance ID \_\_\_\_\_  
Allergies \_\_\_\_\_  
Medical Conditions \_\_\_\_\_  
Current Medication and Therapies \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Secondary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Cell \_\_\_\_\_  
Social Security Number \_\_\_\_\_ Insurance ID \_\_\_\_\_  
Allergies \_\_\_\_\_  
Medical Conditions \_\_\_\_\_  
Current Medication and Therapies \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Secondary Physician \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_

If parents cannot be reached please contact:

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_ Relation \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_
2. Name \_\_\_\_\_ Relation \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_
3. Name \_\_\_\_\_ Relation \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Secondary Insurance Information:

Insurance Name \_\_\_\_\_ Policy Holder \_\_\_\_\_ Group # \_\_\_\_\_ Plan # \_\_\_\_\_  
Insurance Phone Numbers \_\_\_\_\_  
Insurance Address \_\_\_\_\_

## Doctor Phone List

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

**Doctor Phone List Continued**

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Patient Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Specialty \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ After Hours \_\_\_\_\_

# School Contact Information

School Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_  
Vice Principal \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_  
Secretary's Names \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_  
Nurse's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_  
Guidance Councilor \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Bus # to School \_\_\_\_\_ Driver Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Bus # Home \_\_\_\_\_ Driver Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Case Manager \_\_\_\_\_ Relation \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_ Best Time & Way to Contact Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

General Ed Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_ Best Time & Way to Contact Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom # \_\_\_\_\_  
Student is with this Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom # \_\_\_\_\_  
Student is with this Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom # \_\_\_\_\_  
Student is with this Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom # \_\_\_\_\_  
Student is with this Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Subject \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom # \_\_\_\_\_  
Student is with this Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Therapy \_\_\_\_\_ Therapists Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Amount of Therapy/week \_\_\_\_\_ Days of Therapy \_\_\_\_\_  
Best Time & Way to Contact Therapist \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Therapy \_\_\_\_\_ Therapists Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Amount of Therapy/week \_\_\_\_\_ Days of Therapy \_\_\_\_\_  
Best Time & Way to Contact Therapist \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Therapy \_\_\_\_\_ Therapists Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Amount of Therapy/week \_\_\_\_\_ Days of Therapy \_\_\_\_\_  
Best Time & Way to Contact Therapist \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Therapy \_\_\_\_\_ Therapists Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Amount of Therapy/week \_\_\_\_\_ Days of Therapy \_\_\_\_\_  
Best Time & Way to Contact Therapist \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

# Phone Log

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for call \_\_\_\_\_

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up required \_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up complete \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for call \_\_\_\_\_

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up required \_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up complete \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for call \_\_\_\_\_

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up required \_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up complete \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for call \_\_\_\_\_

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up required \_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up complete \_\_\_\_\_



# The Paper Chase: Managing Your Child's Documents Under the IDEA

by Robert K. Crabtree, Esq.

## Introduction

If you've got kids with special educational needs, you can be overwhelmed by the paperwork in no time at all. From the beginning of school to the time your child either graduates or "ages out" of entitlement to special ed services, the accumulation of IEP's, evaluations, progress reports, correspondence, notes, journals, samples of your child's work, and medical records, will fill several drawers of a file cabinet or take up most of your shelf space.

You might be tempted to throw out papers when they get out of hand, but this may be a mistake. Even the oldest documents in your child's history can sometimes help you make a case for increased or different services under IDEA.

Make sure you understand the relative importance of different documents and organize them sensibly.

Here are some guidelines to help you manage them.

## Which Documents Are Keepers?

Here's a list of the different documents that you'll see over the course of your child's special needs education. You should keep them all!

**1. Individualized Educational Programs (IEP's) and other official service plans.** In addition to IEP's, you may have Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP). These are service plans that govern early intervention programs for kids before they're old enough to receive special education services, or plans that are written by agencies other than the local school system (such as a department of mental health or mental retardation).

**2. Evaluations by the school system and by independent evaluators.** Depending on your child, these will include educational, psychological and/or neuropsychological, speech and language, occupational therapy, and physical therapy evaluations.

**3. Medical records.** You probably don't need to keep all medical records with your child's IDEA documents. Keep only those that relate to the disability or disabilities that affect his ability to learn or to access school programs and facilities. As with any other kind of document, when in doubt, keep it!

**4. Progress reports and report cards.** These are the formal documents where the school system periodically describes how your child is doing.

**5. Standardized test results.** School systems often administer standardized tests (such as the California Achievement Tests) to all students. These tests can provide a helpful comparison to the progress reports written by your child's teachers.

**6. Notes on your child's behavior or progress.** These will include notes from you to the teacher, from the teacher to you, or journal entries between you and your child's service providers. Sometimes notes from a concerned teacher tell a different story than the formal report the teacher develops at the request of her supervisor when the TEAM convenes.

**7. Correspondence.** Save any correspondence between you and teachers, special education administrators, TEAM chairpersons, and evaluators. Don't forget emails -- print them out and include them in your correspondence file. Also save correspondence from the school system that's addressed to you or to all special education parents describing issues that affect your child. This may include letters describing new programs, changes in programs or services, school system policies for children with special education needs, or budget issues.

**Note:** Do you use certified mail, return receipt requested, when you send letters or notices to the school system? Sometimes this is necessary, but more often, this just adds unnecessary delay to the delivery of the letter or notice.

It's better to hand-deliver the document and ask for a receipt. Remember that in most courts and administrative forums, a letter mailed in ordinary first-class mail is presumed to have been delivered within three days of its mailing.

**8. Notes from conversations and meetings** with school personnel, evaluators, the child's TEAM, or other interactions relating to your child's program or needs. Be certain to take excellent notes at key meetings or, better yet, bring someone with you whose only task is to take notes (especially at TEAM meetings). These notes can help enormously when, months later, you try to remember exactly what various people said or what agreements were reached.

**Note:** Should you tape TEAM meetings? Do you have the right to tape them? The answer to both questions is "probably not." Under the laws pertaining to discrimination on the basis of handicap, you may have the right to tape a meeting if it's necessary to accommodate a disability (for example, if one or both parents have a language processing disorder). You may also have the right to tape a meeting if it's conducted in a language other than the parents' first language. Generally, the right to tape a meeting hasn't been determined to exist under IDEA.

Ordinarily, if you ask in advance to tape a TEAM meeting, the school system should let you as a courtesy, and will usually tape the meeting also. You need to consider, however, that having a tape recorder may inhibit the participants and create a feeling of hostility at the meeting. Again, it's usually better if someone takes excellent notes.

**9. Documents relating to discipline and/or behavioral concerns.** These include notices of detention and suspension (both in and out of school), letters describing the concerns of service providers or school administrators about behavior, records of behavioral assessments, and records of behavioral plans for addressing behavioral issues.

**10. Formal notices of meetings scheduled to discuss your child.** When you get a notice like this, jot down the date you received it. Sometimes the question of whether a school system has met time requirements is important under IDEA. (It is sometimes a good idea to keep copies of the envelopes in which such notices arrive. Check the date of the notice or letter and the date of the postmark. It could be significant if the postmark is later than the date on the notice.)

**11. Samples of schoolwork.** You don't need to keep every scrap of writing or drawing that your child produces, but it can be helpful to keep examples each year. You can compare these to show how much progress he's made in different academic areas.

**12. Invoices and cancelled checks.** Save the ones from services that you provide for your child's educational development. For example, if you hire a speech and language pathologist for an hour of therapy each week to supplement the school system's services, keep a record of any payment. Eventually, you can seek reimbursement for this expense. (You must be able to prove that it was necessary because the school's services weren't allowing your child to progress effectively.)

**13. Public documents.** These help explain how your school system works with children like yours. They include newspaper articles featuring special education administrators, school committee members, or superintendents talking about reorganizing special education programs, cutting expenses, or new teaching approaches.

Remember that except in rare cases, you don't need to keep drafts of any documents. The drafts may lead to confusion if you ever need to seek services for your child through the due process system. This is one area where you can and most often should lighten your document load.

## Your Child's School Records

Visit the school or special education office every once in a while to look at your child's student records. You want to be sure that you have all the documents the school has. Find out if you have documents that the school doesn't. You can also find out about the rules and regulations in your state for accessing your child's records. In general, all states must provide access under a federal law called the Buckley Amendment (the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974*, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1221, 1232g).

Typically, you have the right to see the records, wherever they are kept, and to have copies provided to you. You may also have the right to ask that a certain document be removed. If your request is denied, you can appeal the decision.

## What Documents Should You Create?

Why is it important to create documents? One reason is that you may have to tell your child's story to another person -- an evaluator, an advocate or lawyer, or a hearing officer -- in order to get help. Documenting events as they occur will help you tell the story accurately. A second reason is that documents can help clarify understandings you reach with people -- particularly with service providers or school administrators. A third reason is that documents that are written when something happens support you when you need to prove that the event happened the way you say it happened.

## Keep a Journal

It can take years for parents to realize that they should have kept better notes of meetings, telephone calls, and important events in their child's educational career. If your young child has a disability in need of special education, get ahead of the game by developing this habit now.

Your notes may be important later when you need an accurate description of what key people said at a TEAM meeting, at a parent meeting, or in an evaluator's office.

Some parents keep a journal with dates, short descriptions of events or conversations, and the names of people who were involved. This doesn't mean you need to include every tiny detail of your child's life, but a well-kept journal can help you explain to others (or to yourself) how you got to the current situation.

Try to record these events:

- Dates of meetings with school personnel
- Dates you received key documents (such as notices of TEAM meetings)
- Dates you sent or delivered key documents
- Dates you gave school personnel important information (such as "1/7/99: Told Mary's teacher
- hat she'd been spending three hours every night trying to do 15-minute math assignments").
- Dates on which your child was suspended or disciplined

## **Create Agreements**

Some documents are designed to record understandings reached with others. The most formal example of this is a contract signed by the parties who agree to its terms. (Note: An IEP is really a contract. It records an agreement reached between parents and school systems that governs: 1) the types of services to be delivered to a child for a specific period of time; 2) the location of those services; and 3) the identity of service providers. It's signed by each party.

Even without an "official" agreement, you can create your own document to help prove that an understanding was reached. Here's an example:

Your special education director tells you that the school system will hire an expert on inclusion techniques. You'll be given the chance to meet with the expert about your child. Follow up this conversation with a friendly letter to the director. In the letter, thank her for taking the time to discuss your concerns about the classroom, and describe your understanding of the steps she promised to take. End your letter by asking the director to respond immediately if you have misunderstood anything.

This letter may not "prove" that the director said what you claim she said, but if she doesn't send back a response, there's an implication that she did say those things.

## **Other Documents**

There may be other documents that can help your child. Has your child been tested repeatedly over the years, with steadily declining results? You may want to create a chart of test results to focus the TEAM on that history.

Have the people who work with your behaviorally-involved child wondered what precipitates his aggressive outbursts? Keep a record of the things that are said and done immediately before such explosions -- whether witnessed by you or told to you. You may be able to

solve the mystery, and focus your child's service providers on developing a plan to work with these behaviors.

## Meeting Your Lawyer

When parents ask an attorney or lay advocate for advice on their child's rights under IDEA, the first thing the adviser must do is review all the relevant documents. How should you organize them?

Special education lawyers will ask you to send copies of all your child's documents in chronological order before you meet. This gives the lawyers a chance to read them and get a full picture of your child and what has been done for her in the special education system. Unless the lawyer or advocate asks, don't try to organize your documents by category (IEP's in one file, evaluations in another, correspondence in another). The most efficient way for the lawyer to understand your child's history is to see the development step by step.

Because you may present documents as exhibits at a hearing or in court, don't write comments on them. (You can make notes with post-its.)

You should also give the lawyer a chronology of the events that have led you to consult with him. This doesn't have to be extremely detailed. Shoot for an outline that gives some perspective on what led to your child's current situation.

Finally, you should give your lawyer or advocate a list of all the key people that have been involved with you or your child. Include their full names, addresses, and phone numbers if you can.

## Formal Discovery

If your search for services leads to a formal due-process proceeding, you'll have whatever "discovery" rights are available under the rules in your state. Usually these rules allow parties to have the opposing parties produce documents that are either relevant to the issues the hearing officer must decide or may lead to relevant evidence.

Here are some of the documents lawyers will typically ask school systems to produce in formal discovery:

- Descriptions of proposed programs;
- Copies of your child's proposed daily or weekly schedule under the proposed IEP;
- Copies of the daily or weekly schedules of proposed service providers;
- Copies of curricula, materials, behavioral plans, that govern the classrooms where your child would be placed;
- Resumes and information on the certification, training, and experience of proposed service providers;
- Profiles of other students with whom the school system proposed to place the child;
- IEP's of the other students (with their names blacked out);
- Reports of any program or fiscal audits of the school system and of the particular program in which the school system proposes to place your child;

- Annual or other reports that the school system files with the state education agency about special education programs; and
- Minutes taken by school system personnel at any key meetings about your child (especially TEAM meetings).

## Conclusion

In this article, you learned how to organize your child's records, what records to keep, and how to create documents.

You learned that to get help for your child, you may have to tell your child's story to another person -- an evaluator, an advocate or lawyer, or a hearing officer. If you document events as they happen, your records will help you tell your child's story accurately.

You learned to use documents to clarify the understandings you reach with special education service providers and school administrators. Finally, you learned that documents that you write at the time an event happens can provide support if you need to prove that the event happened.

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## Meet Robert Crabtree

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# Organizing Your Child's Special Education File: Do It Right!

From <http://www.fetaweb.com/03/organize.file.htm>

*"Do the hard jobs first. The easy jobs will take care of themselves."* - Dale Carnegie

The special education system generates mountains of paper. You need a simple, foolproof document management system.

In Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy, we teach you how to organize your child's file. After you organize all the information about your child, you will have a clearer understanding of your child's disability and educational needs.

## Document Management System

Think about the last school meeting. Did the IEP team members have a complete copy of your child's file? Did you have a complete copy of your child's file? How can the IEP team make decisions about your child's special education program if they do not have complete, accurate information about your child?

Schools keep records in different places. Information and reports are misplaced.

When you organize your child's file, you will have all the information about your child in one place. With our document management system, you can track your child's educational history. When you use this parent-tested system, you can quickly locate any document in your child's file.

When you take your organized file to the next school meeting, you will understand the power of getting organized. You will gain a sense of control.

## Gather Information About Your Child

Follow these steps to get information about your child.

### Make a Master Provider List

Make a list of all individuals and agencies that may have information or records about your child. Your list should include the names and titles of all professionals who have provided medical or mental health treatment services, including doctors, therapists, and other health care providers. Include their addresses, telephone and fax numbers, and email addresses. You may want to develop your list by category of service rendered, e.g., medical, educational, psychological evaluations.

### Request Your Child's Records

Send a letter to all individuals and agencies on your list and request a copy of your child's records. Explain that your request relates to a school issue and the need to secure an appropriate education for your child. Ask if you should expect to pay a photocopying fee and what this fee will be.

Your letters should be neat and convey a professional image.

**Tip:** See Chapter 23 in *Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy* for sample letters to request information and records.

If you do not receive a response within ten days, send a short letter explaining that you requested information ten days ago and have not received a response. Attach a copy of your original letter to the second request letter. Ask if you can do anything to help expedite the request. Offer to visit the office to help copy the information. Be polite.

**Tip:** Make photocopies of all letters for your file.

## **Request Your Child's Educational Records**

Write a letter to the school and request a complete copy of your child's entire cumulative file and confidential file, omitting nothing. You want copies of all evaluations, records, correspondence, and other documents the school has about your child. Use a word processor for your letter. Expect to pay a reasonable photocopying fee.

**Tip:** See more sample letters at the end of Chapters 23 and 24 in *Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy*.

Send one letter to the principal of your child's school and one letter to the director of special education. If you do not know the director's name and address, call the main office of the school district and request this information. If your child does not attend a public school, send the letter to the principal of the last public school your child attended.

Before you mail these letters, sign them and make copies of the signed letters for your Master File. Log the letters into your contact log.

## **Organizing the Master File**

You will organize and file all information about your child in three-ring notebooks. Gather all documents that relate to your child. Bring all paper in boxes, file folders, and bags together in one place. Begin by organizing the documents by year.

### **Step 1: Date All Documents**

With a pencil, lightly write the date of each document in the lower right corner of the first page (Example: 07/21/08).

**Tip:** Use a soft lead pencil when you date the documents. You may need to erase your notations later.

Before long, mail will roll in from your requests. Using a pencil, lightly date each document in the lower right hand corner. Date everything ? evaluations, reports, correspondence, report cards, and medical reports.

When you find duplicate documents, compare the duplicates, decide which document has the best photocopy quality, and use this as your master. Put the duplicates in a box. You will not need them for your notebook. Do not throw them away. You may need to provide copies to other people later.



**Tip:** Do not write on original documents. You may need copies of these documents later.

Many parents say that when they organize documents, they begin to read and are sidetracked. Force yourself to stick with this job until you finish. Do not stop to read the documents. Just date and organize! Lightly pencil the date on the bottom right corner of the first page.

**Tip:** Work samples provide useful information about your child's skills. Include a few samples of your child's schoolwork.

## **Step 2: File All Documents in a Three-Ring Notebook**

Hole-punch, then file all dated documents in a large three-ring notebook. When you hole-punch, be careful that you do not destroy important signatures or dates. When documents are formatted horizontally, hole-punch on the top edge.

File all documents in chronological order, oldest document on top and newest document at the end. Some parents use the child's birth certificate as the first document in the file. The last document is the most recent piece of information. This may be a report card, IEP, or letter from the school.

**Tip:** Do not put documents in clear plastic envelopes. If you are in a meeting and need to find a document in the file, removing documents from plastic envelopes takes too long.

Do not file documents by category (i.e., IEPs, psychological evaluations, correspondence, etc.). If you file documents by category, your system will fail. Assume you have a comprehensive letter written by a child psychologist three years ago. The Eligibility Committee and the IEP team used the psychologist's letter. Is this document a letter? A report? An evaluation?

Trying to figure out categories is confusing and time-consuming. If your system is confusing and difficult, it will fail. Use our parent-tested system. You have better things to do with your time!

## **Step 3: Read the Master File for the "Big Picture"**

After you complete Step 2, read your child's Master File from beginning to end. When you read the information chronologically, you will see the big picture.

At the beginning of this article, we mentioned the mountains of paper generated by the special education system. After reports are written, they are filed away. Few people will read or review this information again.

Because there is no master plan, no one looks at the big picture.

Instead of looking at the forest, parents and school staff focus on the bark of the trees. When you organize your child's file, you will see the forest. You will understand. Many parents say that making a neat, organized, chronological Master File is a powerful educational experience for them.

## Create Your Document List

You have dated the documents and filed them in chronological order, oldest document on top, most recent on the bottom. Now you need to create your Master Document List. When you organize documents chronologically and generate your Master Document List, you can compress your child's history into a few pages. You can locate any document in seconds.

**Tip:** If you want to make a note on a document in your Master File, write on a sticky note that you attach to the document.

To create your Master Document List, make a table with four columns. If you are using a word processing program, insert a four-column table. If you are not using a computer, draw a table with four columns on several sheets of paper. Label the columns: Date, Author, Type, and Significance.

| Date | Author | Type | Significance |
|------|--------|------|--------------|
|      |        |      |              |
|      |        |      |              |
|      |        |      |              |

Enter each document by date, author, and type. You can leave the "Significance" column blank for now.

### **Download Sample Document List in pdf.**

Attach sticky notes to all pages in your Master File that have test scores (i.e., the Wechsler Intelligence Test and Woodcock Johnson Tests.)

**Tip:** If you use a word processing program, the program can sort the list by date, author, or type of document.

When you use a word processing program, you can change the font to highlight test data and other important information. You make it easier to find important information.

**Tip:** **Download a Master Document List** with information.

When you organize your child's file, you will learn about your child's disability and educational history. This is an important step in becoming an expert. When you finish this job, you will have a clearer understanding of your child's educational needs.

You do not need to complete the "Significance" column yet. When you learn more about evaluations and test scores, you will recognize important information in documents.

**Tip:** See how a Master Document List is used to create **an Exhibit List** for a due process hearing.

## **In Summation**

When you organize your child's file, the process of organizing information helps you understand your child's disability, history, and educational needs. When you create your Master Document List, you can find a specific document quickly and easily - a good thing at meetings.

## **More Articles About Documents and Organizing Information**

[The Paper Chase: Managing Your Child's Documents Under the IDEA by Bob Crabtree, Esq.](#) If you have kids with special educational needs, you can be overwhelmed by paperwork in no time. This article teaches you about the importance of different documents and how to organize them. You learn about documents that are keepers; education records; documents you should create and how; tips for consulting with an attorney.

[Paper Trails: Documents, Exhibit Lists and Due Process Hearings](#) by Pete Wright. This is one of several articles about documents that was published in the [Fall 2001 issue of The Beacon](#).

[Paper Trails, Letter Writing and Documentation](#). When you advocate for a child, you use logs, calendars, and journals to create paper trails.

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**Table 9-3. Sample Master Document List**

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Author</b>            | <b>Type</b>              | <b>Significance</b>  |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 7/16/01     | Cannon                   | Psychological Evaluation | School evaluation.<br><b>WISC-III</b> IQ above avg.<br><b>WJ-R</b> : Reading, writing skills 3 years delayed.            |
| 8/23/01     | Center Elementary School | IEP                      | Placed in resource program.<br>Progress will be 80% on teacher made tests and observations.                              |
| 5/14/02     | Collins                  | Educational Evaluation   | School evaluation with <b>WJ-R, TOWL, K-ABC</b> .<br>No gain in reading and writing skills.<br>Percentile ranks dropped. |
| 6/6/02      | Center Elementary School | Report Card              | B's in Reading and Writing.<br>Promoted to next grade.   |
| 9/10/02     | Stein                    | Psychiatric Evaluation   | Severely <b>depressed</b> . Anti-depressant meds increased. MD recommends psychiatric hospital                           |
| 10/14/02    | Barton                   | Educational Evaluation   | Private sector evaluation.<br><b>WRAT &amp; WIAT</b> .<br>Child illiterate; requires 1:1 direct instruction.             |
| 11/5/02     | Stein                    | Discharge Summary        | Severe depression from school failure, poor academic skills; needs remediation.  |