

Tips & Tools for Families: Prior Written Notice (PWN)

Prior Written Notice (PWN): a requirement under **special education rules** when a district proposes, or refuses, to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, placement or provision of “FAPE” (free appropriate public education).

A PWN is also a **powerful tool to help understand what decisions have been made and why**. For students who have an IEP, or might need one, there are many steps in an ongoing process of evaluation, planning and delivery of services. **Having a clear written record of significant decisions and the reasons for them is critical.**

A Prior Written Notice (PWN) is:

- a **written** document
- **from the district**, to the parents
- provided **after a decision is made**, but **prior to/before it is implemented**
- that is **required** under the special education rules
- for **decisions** relating to a **child’s identification, evaluation, placement or provision of special education services**, including those:
 - made at an IEP meeting or
 - made by the district in response to a parent’s request.

PWNs must describe the decision made, the reasons for it, other options considered, and information relied upon to make the decision. They must also provide parents information about their rights if they do not agree with the decision.

Districts must translate PWNs into the parent’s native language, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so.

If you do not receive a PWN or the PWN does not reflect significant decisions an IEP team made, you can request that the district provide one. **Check out three variations of a sample request for a PWN on the following page.**

Read more about PWNs in your **Special Education Notice of Procedural Safeguards** and in OSPI’s Understanding PWN short guidance. Review special education rule on Prior Notice at: WAC 392-172A-05010. To see what a PWN looks like, find one on OSPI’s Model Forms for Special Education page.

*Have you **requested an evaluation, a re-evaluation, or a change to your child’s IEP (Individualized Education Program)**?*

*Did you get a **Prior Written Notice (PWN)** in response?*

This toolkit explains **why PWNs are important**, and what to do if you have not received one, or if a PWN has only very general information.

Didn't get a PWN? Didn't see a significant decision reflected in the PWN you received? Here are three variations on sample requests for a PWN:

Dear IEP Case manager (or special education teacher),

Thank you for talking with me about my request for (e.g., an initial evaluation; an early re-evaluation; a Functional Behavior Assessment; other). Please provide me with a Prior Written Notice with the district's response to this request and confirm the next steps for moving forward.

After an IEP meeting

Dear IEP Case manager (or special education teacher),

Thank you for getting the IEP team together discuss (e.g. request for one-on-one support; increased time in general education; concerns about behavior referrals; other). I understand the next steps will be _____. Please provide me a Prior Written Notice to reflect the team's decision on this issue and a copy of the amended IEP (if relevant).

For a revised PWN

Dear IEP Case Manager,

Thank you for providing me with a copy of the updated IEP after our annual meeting. I have reviewed the IEP and the attached PWN. I noticed that the PWN does not include information regarding our discussion and conclusions relating to (e.g. increasing/decreasing service minutes; assistive technology; other). Please provide me with a revised PWN that reflects the decision on this/these issue(s). **Please be sure the entire PWN is translated into (my native language)**.

Sincerely,
Parent

Tip: Review the PWN attached to the Updated IEP

After your IEP meeting, look to see if there is a PWN attached to the back of the updated IEP. If it includes only very general statements, like "*The team decided to update the IEP*" because "*it is required to be done annually,*" **do not hesitate to ask for a more complete PWN.**

Sometimes the IEP will reflect a decision made at the meeting (for example if a team decides some specially designed instruction will shift from a resource room to a general education setting, the service matrix would be changed). However, an IEP would not reflect a request for a change that was ultimately denied. And the IEP itself doesn't generally describe *reasons why* a change is made.

Without a PWN, important decisions, and reasons for them, may be lost to memory.