

How to Obtain Conference Funding through the IEP Process

A little known section of federal law states “that parent training is a related service specifically mentioned.” Parent training is defined, *as support and education provided to a family to better understand their child’s unique needs.* Most commonly school districts offer workshops and classes to help parents understand their child’s disability. This is appropriate when schools themselves have a deep understanding of specific disabilities, and is commonly offered for disabilities such as Attention Deficit Disorder, Learning Disability, and Autism. However, it is highly unlikely there is an expert within the school district on SMS, and highly unlikely the school district could consult with a local expert. Simply, the incident rate of 1 in 25,000 makes the PRISMS conference the only place a parent can truly obtain information and understanding on their child’s unique disability. Below you will find steps to take in order for the school district to provide financial support to attend the PRISMS conference. Also, you will find the specific law referenced and a URL for a website to gain further information.

How do I get the school district to financially support attending the PRISMS conference?

1. Ask for an IEP meeting via email. A parent is able to ask for a meeting at any time, even if the annual meeting has already been held.
2. In the same email, provide an explanation for your request: (for example):
At the IEP meeting, we wish to discuss the school district funding our attendance at the PRISMS conference. Our understanding is the law (Sec 300.34) specifically states parent training as a related service, and further defines parent training (Sec 300.34.8i) as assisting parents in understanding the special needs of their child. Considering there is no local expert on SMS, we are requesting funding to attend the PRISMS conference in St Louis, MO. You can find more information about this conference at prisms.org.
3. At the IEP meeting, document the funding that the school district is committing to and whether the funds will be paid directly or reimbursed. It is easiest to get a school district to commit to paying for registration fees. However, if a family is still unable to attend because travel fees are unaffordable, these funds can be requested as well. It is strongly suggested to be reasonable in your request. If you can afford to fund a portion of the trip, do not ask for those funds.
4. If they say no, explain this is necessary for your to help meet your child’s unique needs and that you are willing to seek mediation over the issue. Mediation will cost the school district more than the funds you are requesting (attorney fees, multiple staff being away from job responsibility requiring substitutes to be paid).
5. After the conference, provide school personnel with information to help them also gain a better understanding of your child and SMS.

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What the law says:

Sec. 300.34 Related services

(a) General. Related services means transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education, and includes speech-language pathology and audiology services, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including therapeutic recreation, early identification and assessment of disabilities in children, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling, orientation and mobility services, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes. Related services also include school health services and school nurse services, social work services in schools, and **parent counseling and training**.

(8)

- (i) Parent counseling and training means assisting parents in understanding the special needs of their child;
- (ii) Providing parents with information about child development; and
- (iii) Helping parents to acquire the necessary skills that will allow them to support the implementation of their child's IEP or IFSP.

Website for additional insight:

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/support.bardet.htm>