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Amplifying Student Voices: Advocating for Younger and More Inclusive Representation in IEP Meetings

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Held once a year, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting serves as a pivotal moment in shaping the academic future of students with disabilities. These meetings bring together the parent, the educator, and, in some cases, the student to determine whether a child's educational needs are being met. In theory, it's a space for collaboration. In practice, it too often sidelines the very person it's meant to serve, the student – often inadvertently.

New Jersey faces a range of complex challenges in the area of special education—chief among them, the fact that the state has the lowest inclusion rate for students with disabilities in the nation. While there is no single solution to address these systemic issues, we can begin by taking practical, high-impact steps that center the student experience. One such step is lowering the age at which students are mandatorily invited to participate in their IEP meetings—from 14 to 12.

This proposal reflects a broader trend in the State's initiatives to reform the IEP process by increasing accessibility and transparency for families; however, student voices continue to be sidelined.

With proper support and parental notice, students can start building self-advocacy skills earlier, when it matters most. Requiring students to wait until high school to be encouraged to participate in IEP meetings is simply too late.

But why does it matter?

Read the full article [here](#)!

