



ILLINOIS
STATE BOARD OF
EDUCATION

SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Educational Surrogate Parent Program

FAQ for ESPs

This document is intended to provide non-regulatory guidance on the subject matter listed above. For specific questions, please contact the Illinois State Board of Education.

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EDUCATIONAL SURROGATE PARENT PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Education Surrogate Parent Program Questions

1. What is an Educational Surrogate Parent?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, in regulation 34 CFR 300.519, specifies that children who do not have a parent, whose parent cannot be located, are wards of the state, or are unaccompanied homeless youth must have an Educational Surrogate Parent (ESP) appointed to help protect their educational rights. An ESP participates on the child's behalf in special education processes, such as consent for evaluations and services, changes of placement, development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and other tasks.

ESP responsibilities include:

- Learn about the student's educational needs by getting acquainted with the student, communicating with personnel involved in the student's education and/or care, and observing the student at school.
- Act as the student's advocate for educational matters.
- Provide or withhold consent for assessment services/placement.
- Work with school staff to develop an IEP for the student.
- Negotiate for appropriate services on behalf of the student.
- Abide by the laws of confidentiality when sharing information about the student.
- Request complaint, mediation, or due process procedures, if necessary.
- Report services twice a year.
- Respond to communication from the school/district/ISBE within two business days.

2. Are Educational Surrogate Parents employees of the Illinois State Board of Education?

No. There is a stipend offered, but an ESP is a volunteer. An ESP is not an employee of ISBE.

3. Are Educational Surrogate Parents employees of the Family Matters Parent Information and Training Center?

No. Although ESPs complete their training through the Family Matters Parent Information and Training Center and are welcome to reach out to Family Matters for guidance, they are not employees of said facility.

4. How do I become an ESP?

If you are interested in becoming an ESP, email your name, phone number, and address to surrogate@isbe.net.

ISBE works with the Family Matters Parent Information and Training Center to train ESPs, who complete a full-day training. An ESP must complete the entire Family Matters training, pass the training exam, and pass a background check.

5. Do special education professionals have to attend the full-day training?

Yes. Individuals who are current or past special education professionals bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the Educational Surrogate Parent Program. While we respect this experience, the full-day training provides information on the responsibilities and limitations of an ESP. Attending the training will give a clear understanding of the role of the ESP in the IEP process.

6. How will I know that I am an active surrogate?

Upon successful completion of the training course and passing your background check, Family Matters will send your information to ISBE. ISBE will enter you into the ESP Program and issue you a letter welcoming you to the program.

7. How will I know if I have a new student assigned to my caseload?

The online system for ESPs generates a notification letter that is sent to your email as an encrypted document. Once received, follow the instructions to download the encrypted PDF notification.

8. What do I do if a student on my caseload is adopted or moves in with foster parents?

When a student is adopted or gets foster parents, the educational rights transfer to the adoptive or foster parent. Ask the facility to submit a withdrawal request to ISBE and notify us at surrogate@isbe.net.

9. What should I do if my student moves out of the facility/district or graduates?

When a student leaves a facility/district or graduates, ask the facility/district to submit a withdrawal on the ISBE request form and notify us at surrogate@isbe.net.

10. What are the differences between special education-related activities and non-special education-related activities?

An ESP is appointed to engage in special education-related activities only. In some cases, an Illinois Department of Children and Family Services caseworker might be the contact for non-special education-related activities, such as consent for field trips. Please see the chart below for some examples. If there is a question regarding a specific activity, please contact ISBE at surrogate@isbe.net.

Special Education-Related Activities	Non-Special Education-Related Activities
Consent for special education evaluation	Signing consent for Medicaid reimbursement form(s)
Development of or changes to IEP	Phone call that child is sick at school
Consent for special education services	Consent for a field trip
Receipt of IEP goal progress reports	Request for school picture money
Special education meetings: Domain, Evaluation, Annual Review, Manifestation Determination, etc.	Invitation to open house
Notification of disciplinary action	Notification of emergency card information
Change of placement	Notice of snow day, early dismissal, or absence
Changes to the IEP	Consent for medical treatment

11. How often do I need to attend trainings?

A full-day training required to become an ESP. After that, the expectation is that an ESP will attend one, three-hour refresher training *every three years*.

12. What if I want to make changes to the number of students on my caseload?

If at any time you would like to make a change to any of the information on the ESP Information sheet (e.g., distance traveled, number of students, email address, etc.), send an email to surrogate@isbe.net with the changes you would like to make.

13. What are examples of conflict of interest?

Examples of conflict of interest could include:

- The ESP works for an entity.
- An ESP and facility have a history of conflict that cannot be or was not resolved.

If an entity reports a conflict with an ESP and requests removal or exclusion from serving the entity, the ISBE ESP Program team will follow up with both parties for clarification prior to removal.

14. Am I allowed to seek legal advice as a surrogate?

As an ESP, you have the same parental rights that a biological parent or legal guardian has. Please refer to [The Parent Guide to Special Education](#) for information.

15. What if I no longer wish to be a surrogate?

ESPs who no longer wish to be a surrogate can email surrogate@isbe.net to withdraw from the program.

16. How long do I have to respond to communication from ISBE or a district/facility?

Timely communication is important. Surrogates are expected to respond to communications regarding students on their caseload or the ESP Program within two business days. Failure to respond to communication can lead to the surrogate being replaced or deactivated.

Stipend-Specific Questions

17. When are the stipend cycles?

There are two stipend periods for which forms are generated: **January 1 - June 30 and July 1 - December 31**. The first semester stipends are due in July; second semester stipends are due in February.

ESPs will check the appropriate box on the forms to indicate that they are asking for the allotted \$50 stipend per student and fill out meeting information, if there were no services at all, or if they are volunteering their time.

18. Do I get a stipend for every IEP meeting I attend for a student?

ESPs receive a \$50 stipend per student, for each cycle in which they provide services. Stipends are not given per IEP meeting.

19. If I am volunteering my time or there were no services during this cycle, do I still have to fill out and send in the forms?

Yes, you do. All forms must be filled out by you, stating that you are volunteering your time or there were no services during this cycle, and sent in to ISBE. This is a legality for audit purposes.

20. What do I put on the form if the student is no longer on my caseload?

The forms cover an entire six-month stipend period. If the student was on your caseload at any point during the stipend period (e.g., if the stipend period is July 1 – December 31 and a student was withdrawn from your caseload on July 2), you will still receive a form. Simply mark “No Services” and return the form.

21. What if I got a new student after the forms were mailed?

Stipend forms are mailed early for the January 1 – June 30 period, so there is a chance you will be assigned a student after the letters have been mailed. In that case, you will get an additional mailing from ISBE with the form for that specific student.

22. If I do not feel secure writing out my full Social Security number on the forms, can I just put down the last four digits instead?

No, you must write your full Social Security number on each form that you are requesting a stipend for and sign it, or the Fiscal Department will reject your payment.

23. How do I submit my forms?

Stipend forms can be mailed through the U.S. Mail to:

Illinois State Board of Education
Special Education Department
100 North First Street, N-253
Springfield, IL 62777-0001

OR you may upload your forms to the [ISBE Attachment Manager](#).

Important Reminders for Returning Your Forms

- 1) The only acceptable way to submit forms is by either scanning the documents or mailing them.
- 2) **Please do not take/send pictures of your forms.** These become distorted when we try to print them out.
- 3) **Please do not staple, tape, or cut forms.** They need to be scanned into our system and will not go through the scanner if they are altered.

24. This student is no longer on my caseload. Do I still need to complete the form?

If this student was on your caseload at any point during that cycle, you will still be required to fill out the form, even if that student has since been removed from your caseload.

25. This student has graduated. Do I still need to complete the form?

If this student graduated in the middle or end of that stipend cycle, but was still enrolled in school during that period, you will still be required to complete the form.