



The IEP as a living document: A new narrative to drive inclusive communities



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Letter from the President of the Board of Directors

This issue of *Connections* on Individual Education Plans (IEP) is one to share. More than 13% (6.5 million) public school students have an IEP. Everyone involved with an IEP – family, educator, administrator, policy maker – will benefit from information and recommendations found in this edition. A contrast of the typical IEP implementation with the original intent of the legislation helps identify possibilities. Drawing on research and experience, the contributors offer positive and constructive recommendations for collaboration and innovative practices.

Guest Editor Amy L-M Toson, PhD, is to be congratulated for producing an issue of *Connections* that exemplifies the unique partnership that TASH envisions and promotes. A “TASH cadre” of advocates and families, researchers, educators, and other professionals examines a crucial and complex tool – the IEP – that has a long-lasting and formative influence on individuals. The amalgamation of perspectives contributes to outside-the-box analysis, interpretation, and recommendations.

There is heightened importance in sharing this information. Established rights and services for individuals with significant disabilities are currently

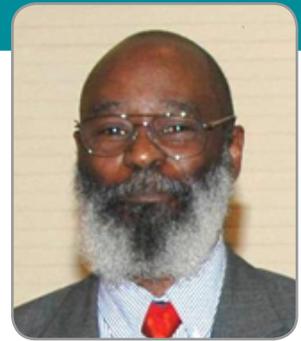
threatened by troublesome attitudes and policies of members of the Executive Branch and Congress, a “states’ rights” approach to Medicaid funding, and significant changes regarding health care. Protection of ADA rights and educational opportunities for students in special education may be reduced.

The information herein may reignite the commitment to free appropriate public education by its encouragement of an inclusive community and authentic partnership and programming, rather than mere compliance.

Please share. There are more than six million students who can benefit from this information.



President, TASH Board of Directors



Ralph Edwards, President

Letter from the Executive Director

Welcome to this issue of *Connections* on the IEP as a living document: a new narrative to drive inclusive communities. Regardless of age, if you are person with a disability who receives publicly funded services and supports, you will have a plan. Your life may begin with an Early Intervention Plan (EIP) that then morphs into an Individual Education Plan (IEP) when you enter school. As a teenager your IEP will be amended with an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) and then will come Plans that goes by many different names; Individual Support Plan (ISP), Individual Habilitation Plan (IHP), other ubiquitous Treatment Plans (TPs), and so on and so forth.

In the case of this issue of *Connections*, the articles included focus on the planning processes for Individual Educational Plans that are integral to ensuring that the best possible overall goals, objectives and accompanying services and supports are clearly defined. They also provide information on how best to ensure that everyone responsible for carrying out the IEP is accountable to children and their families. For children and their families, these planning processes can also be very difficult to prepare for, navigate and understand.

In the recent takeover of TASH's Facebook page, Janice Fialka, the author of *What Matters: Reflections on Disability, Community and Love*, shared a one-page IEP template which was viewed by over 2,000 people. One reader responded, "As [teachers], we always want to focus on what a child can do, not what they can't.

The unfortunate side is that if their needs are downplayed, they stand a very high chance of not getting the services they deserve." Clearly there is an interest and desire to improve the quality of what is one of the most essential documents created to guide a child's educational progress.

The mandate for a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment has been the overarching provision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for over four decades. The creation of IEPs has also been an essential requirement since its passage. Much has changed in special education and our understanding of Universal Designs for Learning (UDL) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) has expanded evidence-based practices that are now paving the way for the inclusion of all children with disabilities in general education settings. New approaches to using the IEP as a tool to maximize inclusion are exciting and will further the commitment to "ALL Means ALL" in education.



*Ruthie-Marie Beckwith,
Ph.D., Executive Director*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruthie-Marie Beckwith". The script is fluid and cursive.

Executive Director

Introduction

Moving beyond compliance: An Introduction to the IEP Issue

By Amy L-M Toson, PhD, Guest Editor, Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Focusing on how to reframe the IEP as a tool for building authentic inclusive communities for students with significant disabilities, this issue of *TASH Connections* compiles the voices and perspectives from self-advocates, family members, educators, and researchers on how the IEP is more than mere compliance. And how, when developed strategically, it works to shift the focus away from procedural compliance to one of meaningful programming that builds inclusive lives for individuals with significant disabilities.

The IEP, as a foundational requirement of the Individuals with Educational Improvement Act (2004) should be seen as a support to meaningful inclusive lives, yet is all too often seen as a barrier to such programming. We must begin to break down the narrative of procedural compliance and offer real life suggestions of how the field can move forward. This issue will show how the IEP process can be used as beneficial tool for inclusive community building. Together we can re-write the narrative and start action towards building meaningful living IEPs nationally.

The issue authors bring the conversation front and center by problematizing the current compliance and procedural nature of the IEP process. By calling upon the field to embrace the IEP as a living document that is flexible, collaborative and necessary

to build authentic inclusive communities for students with significant disabilities, they each offer strategic solutions for new and innovative practices. This issue brings readers through a journey of problematization to solutions, deconstructing the current practices surrounding the IEP through family and teacher perspectives and then concluding with real day solutions for TASH members to put into action. Included also is a legal analysis and overview of the potential impact of the *Andrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1* decision on what constitutes educational benefit within individualized educational programs.

The issue opens with two parent perspective pieces: *The Individual Education Plan: From individual needs to meaningful relationships* (Black and Montvalo) and *Engaging Parents: Utilizing the IEP to cultivate meaningful relationship* (Ramlackhan and West). Through these parents' honest and open discussions of their experiences as administrators, teachers, scholars and parents of children with significant and multiple disabilities, the current IEP process is outlined as one that: (1) divides parents/guardians against school personnel; (2) uses standards based curriculum as a justification and rationale for segregated programming and placement; and (3) focuses on procedural compliance over authentic partnership. Both then offer new narratives and suggestions of how the IEP can be a flexible tool that is used to strategically develop true partnerships and meaningful systems of support.

Filled with suggestions for teachers, administrators and parents, the next piece by Ramlackhan, *The IEP as a gateway to inclusive spaces*, shares her perspective as an educator working in a system that pushes compliance over authentic partnership and

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programming within the IEP process. Through anecdotes and real life examples she explains how educators and administrators can be engaged to use the IEP to build inclusive spaces, even within a high-pressure teaching and learning environment set by standards based teaching and learning and high stakes testing.

The fourth article, *Functional Communication in the Inclusive Classroom* (Pauly and Knuth), builds upon the notion of standards based IEPs and the needs of learners with significant disabilities. In this article, Pauly and Knuth use vivid imagery to discuss the functional communication needs of students with significant disabilities within inclusive classrooms. Also filled with real life anecdotes and stories from multiple parents, their piece gives step-by-step strategies on how families and school personnel (therapists, teachers, and administrators) can work as a team to collaboratively build and implement standards based IEPs that embed authentic and meaningful functional communication goals within inclusive settings.

In *Standards based IEPs – Are they important and what should be in them?* –Taub and Burdge explain how standards based IEPs are the federal expectation. Throughout this practice rich article, they outline: (1) why teams should develop standards based IEPs for students with extensive support needs (ESN); and (2) a detailed three step plan on how to write standards based IEPs while embedding goals that directly relate to age appropriate grade level standards, content area foundational skills and address skills (communication, social motor and behavioral) that facilitate participation in inclusive communities and general education settings.

Each piece in the issue thus far highlights the importance of moving beyond compliance towards building trust through genuine collaboration. In the spirit of TASH's activism and solution oriented agenda, this issue finishes strong with pieces that move the field beyond the current procedural compliance narrative to one of building inclusive collaborative systems of support. First, in *Use of Legally Compliant IEPs for Inclusive Programming*, Hyatt and Perzigian outline the key components of the law, eloquently showcasing how “a strategic IEP is an effective tool for ensuring access to regular education environments... and inclusive programming for students with disabilities” with parents as partners in the process. In their second piece, *Andrew F. and an end to the “more than ‘de minimus’ Standard”*, they overview the *Andrew F. v. Douglas County School Dist. RE-1* decision and highlight the impact of the case on the definition of educational benefit within IEPs.

Pulling it all together with a step-by-step implementation process for partnership and collaboration via co-teaching the final piece, *All Together Now: Essential Ideas for Co-Teaching and Inclusion*, Causton and Macleod outline how co-teaching and inclusive “practices connect seamlessly to the Individualized Education Plan.” Each piece of this issue leaves TASH readers and activists with takeaways that can be implemented tomorrow. Inspired by the parents, students and leaders in this field, together, we can change the IEP narrative one child and one policy at a time. It's time to take the intent of congress back and build systems of practices that create flexible IEPs that are living tools used strategically to build inclusive communities for ALL.

About the Author

Amy L-M Toson, PhD has been working both nationally and internationally for well over fifteen years in the area of inclusive community and school capacity building and systems change. She began her career as a community inclusion facilitator and K-12 inclusive education teacher. She then moved into the role of consultant and professor working with families, teachers and leaders across the globe facilitating effective inclusion for all learners, paying special attention to those who are traditionally marginalized and segregated, such as students with intensive support needs. Currently, Amy is an Assistant Professor and Special Education Ph. D. Program Chair within the College of Education and Leadership at Cardinal Stritch University. She researches and teaches doctoral courses on multi-dimensional capacity building, leading/building inclusive systems and communities, doctoral research symposium, and legal and political analysis. Amy received her Ph. D. from the University of South Florida within the Departments of Educational Leadership/Policy Studies and Special Education in 2013. She now resides in the suburbs of Dallas, TX and is taking up action for building inclusive communities across the lifespan there. Reach out to join her: jatoson@mac.com



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- Andrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1, 798 F3d 1329 (10th Circuit, 2015).
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. §1401 et seq..

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The Individual Education Plan: From individual needs to meaningful relationships

By William R. Black, PhD, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of South Florida and Jessica Montalvo, Department of Communication, University of South Florida

Introduction

Despite initial promise, in practice the Individual Educational Plan process is too often guided by a focus on individualized deficits and needs rather than collective practice (Skrtic, 1991; Zeretsky, 2005); generates spaces that are intimidating to parents and educators (Engel 1993; Sapon-Shevin, 2008), and is too often compliance and “cover your ass (CYA)” driven (Black & Burrello, 2010; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Skrtic, 2012).

As parents and scholars, we provide perspectives on the IEP as individualizing and sometimes marginalizing process, and suggest a reframing of the IEP as a site for joint work through a more inclusive and deliberatively democratic process. We would like to reimagine the IEP as a means to develop a community of supports and networks of people that facilitate meaningful, inclusive lives. We write this as a former administrator who led IEP meetings and educator of teachers and administrators who wants to develop engaged/activist educators who imagine better processes (Bill) and as a scholar of communication, disability, and

culture (Jessica) who are also parents of a child with significant disabilities and multiple diagnoses (18p- syndrome and autism).

The IEP focus on Individual Need and the Policing of Insiders and Outsiders

As a school administrator, prior to becoming a parent, I (Bill) recall leading less than ideal practices during IEP meetings: scheduling meetings for very short periods of time; believing that many students may not be well served in inclusive settings; not advocating for more inclusion for students; and shamefully thinking on more than one occasion that the parent was in denial as to the extent of their child’s disability, even as I sympathized with a mother’s tears. I distinctly remember the conversation I had with school-based special education teachers and a district resource teacher after an IEP meeting I convened as an assistant principal. The kindergarten-aged child had been diagnosed with Down syndrome. Our conversation, led by a seemingly sympathetic teacher, focused on how the parent was “in denial” about the needs and abilities of the child and how she had not yet come to accept he needed to be in a separate classroom with separate sets of supports. Regretfully, I would not interact with the parent or child again. In retrospect, I see my own complicity in failing to recognize the parent’s legitimate concern that we were segregating her child at such a young age, denying all students the opportunity to learn from each other.

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Fast forward 13 years and I was the parent who could be framed as “in denial.” In my son’s IEP meeting, I realized that the kindergarten “regular education” teacher, who had come into my son’s meeting for 10 minutes, spent her time talking about how Kindergarten is not what it used to be and described the need for students to be able to be successful with standards-based curriculum. I felt that she set up a regular education/special education border for our five-year-old child. It was as if he had to prove himself to gain access to regular or “normal” education and she was policing a type of regular education/special education border within the space of the IEP meeting, a space guided by a documentation of needs and ability to reach curricular and assessment standards. In this case, I was the parent whose son seemed undesirable and the IEP meeting became mechanism means to carefully construct a type of special education/general education border wall. Standards-based curriculum and assessments seemed to us to be powerful policing tools. I was not unsympathetic to the Kindergarten teacher’s position as I recognize her belief that he would be “better served” elsewhere. I acknowledge that under top-down accountability teachers feel tremendous pressure to get all students under their care to standards, which in turn would maintain their school grade and increase their value added measure (VAM) score, which is linked to their salary. In this more rigid system of school accountability, our son would represent an investment of time that the system would not necessarily reward professionally or financially. An explicit script had already begun to be written for our son in powerful ways as normalizing practices associated with insiders (regular education/inclusion) and outsiders (special education/exclusion with minimal mainstreaming) was being reinforced and policed by the language used in the IEP. Our son was an outsider, even as I, a professor of education and former administrator, was an insider.

Skrtic (2012) argues that schools use separate classrooms to signal compliance with accountability and standards based demands and to minimize disruptions to “normal ways of doing practice” (p. 136). Describing well what happened to us as parents, “consideration for inclusive placements in schools often locates the problem of difference in the student to be included” (Skrtic, 2012, p. 136), and makes the regular education classroom the norm. As such, differences are isolated and individualized rather than approached relationally as an issue for the community to address.

The IEP Template

The IEP we first experienced was emotionally draining. The

script was already constructed with boxes to check and evaluation numbers to put in. More recently we refused an IQ test for our son - knowing it constructs (in)ability by quantifying and objectifying him as less than the norm. The IEP template in our school district has changed and now evaluative scores from testing figure prominently on the first page. This is especially disappointing since it is all too easy for those reading his IEP to formulate particular expectations based on these numbers before even reading the narrative about him. The placement of scores front and center on the IEP rather than as supplementary information at the end, or not included at all, reifies the notion that they are of primary importance. Finally, it seems rather contradictory to emphasize these scores when teachers and schools resist being judged and paid according to their students’ performance on standardized tests. We fear that the standards-based framework toward learning is making schools more bureaucratic. Although many standards-based approaches have well intentioned goals of increasing student achievement, those approaches tend to standardize instruction, which works in tension with the “original emphasis on appropriate individualized education, turning the principle of individualization into standardization of curriculum and instruction” (Skrtic, 2012, p. 135) As the response becomes more bureaucratic, Skrtic argues, it becomes less collaborative.

Despite the involvement of well-intentioned and caring individuals, the structure and layout of the IEP document employed by districts and states can be agentic in ways that channel “behaviors, constitute and stabilize organizational pathways, and broadcast information/orders” (Cooren 2004, p. 388). The structure and language of the IEP document may too often drive the bus and make more inclusive spaces less accessible because of the articulated primacy of behaviors and cognitive abilities. In our own experience, the district’s document uses the language of individualized “needs” to claim the necessity of small group instruction, which in turn is available in a segregated setting. In the end, the process is often constraining and emotionally draining.

IEP Text and Compliance

Even when an IEP is well thought-out and crafted around student assets, in the end the IEP remains a legal document that feeds compliance expectations. The IEP seems to focus more on compliance and on the legality of the document. Skrtic (2012) argues that the democratic underpinnings that produced the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975:

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were undercut by the statute's legal and institutional interpretation and by the design of its parent participation and due process provisions. As a result rather than democratic solutions to the recognized special education problems of ineffective instruction, exclusion, and racial/ethnic and social class bias the EAHCA-and its progeny, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA)-merely enabled individual parents to mount narrow technical challenges to their child's diagnosis, needs, and accommodations. (p. 129)

Skrtic (2012) further reminds us that special education processes and procedures were originally conceptualized in EAHCA legislative deliberations as being informal and responsive and premised on a collective good. It was envisioned as a system in which student classification would be relatively open with an essential role for robust parent participation. While the original framers of EAHCA wanted "a precedent-based system of open hearings and collective advocacy leading to improved practice through systemic reform...instead actual due process hearings are private affairs centered on students IEP's" (p. 131).

Our own experience with IEPs reflects the turn toward compliance and legalistic language that focus on needs of the individual rather than collective advocacy. The objectivist language that is used to write goals and objectives (i.e. 10% improvement, in a nine week period, in an array of 3, in 3 out of 5 trials) centers the student's deficits and creates compliance driven timelines that are ultimately unpredictable. The focus on discrete goals and objectives certainly has its place, but it may limit the ways in which parents can contribute and collaborate on the plan's development and deemphasize the original rationale of collective advocacy underpinning the origins of the IEP.

We have been fortunate to work with teachers and therapists in our school who understand this and show deep caring and commitment to our child. Perhaps because of this, a vast majority of our time is spent addressing the narrative section/present levels of the IEP and less on goals and objectives. Tailoring for the individual is important, but often it feels like we miss the forest for the trees. Objectives and goals are part of supporting the student, but it is through relationships and dialogue that we try to create a web of support for our children, that we are held accountable to include multiple voices, that we recognize that a child cannot be reduced to formulas and rubrics or be expected to make progress in a particular way or at a specific pace. The IEP document and process can set up a type of contractual agreement that in its efforts to individualize, sometimes isolates

and keeps discussions private by emphasizing technical language and expertise. The process provides a semblance of objective rigor rather than creating an arena for genuine discussion and collaboration that creates a community of support.

This creates great frustration for me (Bill), as I seek to teach educators to imagine a better future. I advocate for inclusion as a comprehensive school reform that is reflected in the language of the IEP (Capper & Frattura, 2009; Sapon-Shevin, 2008). However, with these normalizing scripts we have described above in place, as our son has gotten older, it has become clear to us that our efforts to have him in "regular education" for at least some parts of the day have not been implemented because of his "behavior," and individual "need." We have yet to find a collective way to create the organizational capacity to implement a vision of the school as a fully inclusive space. The special education teachers and therapists at our son's IEP meetings generally agree with us on these points, but feel they can be most effective directly addressing his needs than attempting to transform the opinions and standard practices of regular education colleagues who only see him for a brief period in the day. In turn, sadly, some regular education teachers, by virtue of segregated practices, have sometimes failed to recognize their special education colleagues as teachers with specialized expertise that can support them. Special Education teachers' contributions are viewed as marginal rather than integrated and baked into the set of meaningful, inclusive activities that are supported across spaces in and out of the school. In contrast to many of our experiences, we envision the IEP process as central to driving the development of a network of support systems in and out of school - the IEP can be a tool for collective advocacy and collaboration.

Decentering the "I" in IEP: Towards a Relational Framework

Instead of operating as a guide for compliance and focusing on the academic deficits in the child, might the IEP be reimagined as a relationship development plan for the child, adults, siblings, and other people who live and work in relationship with each other? If a network is developed and centered in an IEP, then the capacity to support and develop an individual with significant disabilities is not constrained by the narrow framing of the student's developmental disability and limited intellectual access points, but can be as expansive as a growing web of resources in support of each other and the children. In this way, IEPs can highlight capacity as a relational resource - the ability to honor and engage with students with significant disabilities, while also relating to a

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network of adults who live around the child - be they therapists, aides, relatives, siblings, neighbors, other parents.

A meaningful IEP is about implementation of complex, interacting, and sometimes ad-hoc systems (e.g. scheduling systems, grade level and content level teams, resource teachers, administration, out of school supports, parents) (Burrello & Sage, 1979; Capper & Frattura, 2009; Rayner, 2007). In this vision, while the individual is never lost, he or she is decentered so that central questions are not where the student is at cognitively or behaviorally (which remains important) or what deficits need to be addressed, but the central focus is on what the adults are doing and how their collective efforts can be evaluated and improved.

Research on parents of children with “significant disabilities” and “challenging behaviors” has suggested that parents’ experiences can be grouped into 5 themes: obtaining useful information, obtaining services, financial stress, stress among members of the family, and community isolation (Worcester, Nesman, Raffaele Mendez, & Keller, 2008). As parents, we can attest to all of the above issues. Yet, in reframing the IEP, here we focus not on the potential to provide services and supports for areas of “need,” a common focus of the IEP, but on the IEP as a democratic space for relational development. Grounded in fully inclusive approaches that center ethical and deliberatively democratic frames of reference (Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Rayner, 2007; Zeretksy, 2005), we envision the IEP as a potential space for focusing on the myriad of relationships that provide supports for the child. Those relationships can provide opportunities for the development of colleagues and friends as well, as the stress of living and working with a child with a disability can be quite significant (Worcester, et. al., 2008).

The IEP Meeting as a Town Hall Meeting

While focusing on networks of supportive relationships takes time, the IEP could be developed strategically. An IEP meeting could come to share more elements of a town hall meeting, a space for deliberative democracy. As a scholar of democratic education, Gutman (1987) argues that schools are more likely to uphold democratic potential when there is a respectful regard for interdependent contributions. Marsh (2007) discusses how the framework of deliberative democracy, which draws upon the work of John Dewey and others, came out of dissatisfaction with dominant ways of engaging in politics, which had a “perceived overreliance on individual rights, and [an] inability to address important moral controversies”(p. 11). Marsh’s study on

democratic dilemmas in schools suggests that demonstrated effort to involve a broader range of stakeholders in “democratic joint work” builds trust. By involving a networked group of individuals in an IEP, “us-them” divides may decline as “giving participants opportunities to explain themselves and identify common interests and motivations can only help to build trust” (Marsh, 2007, p. 167). By setting up the IEP in this manner, trust “may be both a precondition and outcome of joint work” (Marsh, 2007, p. 168).

The IEP could become a space to develop procedures for interdependent contributions, a type of democratically deliberative community of practice, which Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) define as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). If educators come see themselves as democratic professionals, then they could work with the IEP structure collaboratively, using a deliberative model of inquiry in which alternative interpretations of needs, accommodations, and associated practices are judged and selected or integrated in terms of their educational and social consequences for children and families, and their contribution to the realization of democratic ideals in schools, communities and societies at large. (Skrtic 2012, p. 142)

Skrtic (2012) envisions a type of deliberative process that we would agree with: “the goal would be to create an open, deliberative IEP process with collective advocacy” (p. 139). He says the process would seek out opposing views and looking at preferred solutions “through a dialogical process grounded in practical reasoning” (139).

The IEP becomes then a framework of expectations and roles for democratic joint work - a deliberative democratic space. The IEP can be a space for joint work that structures a community of practice organized around the child. The work attends to the following concerns (Marsh, 2007, p. 6):

- ◆ **What:** to what ends the work is directed and visions of purpose
- ◆ **Who:** who participants are and are there enough from various parts of a child’s life
- ◆ **How:** So rules of conduct are set out, as well as how decisions are made

In this conception, the IEP is designed as a collective endeavor with clearly articulated procedures that involve all who are

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important to an individuals' life. The IEP process does not try to pit interests of parents and the school against each other, but is concerned with processes that develop trust. In doing so, the IEP attends to both power distribution between participants and powerful organizational norms (like what the role of the teacher or parent "should" be) come to be addressed and deliberated democratically (Marsh, 2007). A Town Hall IEP builds learning for individuals and promotes collective capacity.

Toward an Adhocracy

Might the IEP text be more fluid and variable? Capper and Frattura (2009) assert that inclusive educational systems focus on a much more fluid system of supports. Others have long argued for the development of "adhocracies" rather than more rigid or set procedures. Adhocracies are formed around issues as they come up and utilize the tools at hand (including networks of support) to solve the problem at hand. Adhocracies appreciate divergent views and innovative thinking above compliance and consistency (Burrello & Sage, 1979; Skrtic, 2012).

Skrtic (1991) argues for a distinct conceptualization of an adhocracy as a means for leadership work centered on learning for individual children rather than for bureaucratic efficiency. Thus the individual is not lost in this reorientation, just the individual as the problem. When possible, IEP networks should work on systems of support that evolve and are more like an adhocracy rather than a rule bound bureaucracy.

Conclusion

The focus on relationships and roles would put more attention on the capacity to deliver a system of supports in which elements of the system are evaluated individually and collectively. This becomes not a reform of an individual, but an institutional reform. We are held accountable by our commitments to a relationship in which we each play crucial roles. In some ways this runs the risk of having

changing personnel feel less invested in certain aspects of their individual role, but being an integral part of a community that helps a child has got to be more motivating than fear of being out of compliance with a contractual agreement. We may be accused of idealism, for surely disagreements will occur regardless, but as parents, we'd be more reassured in a space where we are all working towards changing the way things are to the way things could be.

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The Individual Education Plan: From individual needs to meaningful relationships

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Empowering Parents: Utilizing the IEP to cultivate meaningful relationships

By Karen Ramlackhan, PhD, University of South Florida and Tish West, Parent Advocate

Caroline's Vignette

Caroline is 19 years old, has two adoring parents and three older siblings: two brothers and a sister. She was born with a rare neurological condition called Alternating Hemiplegia of Childhood (AHC). This diagnosis was confirmed in 2013 when the AHC gene was discovered; now genetic testing can determine this condition in infants. Prior to 2013, Caroline's parents were committed to finding the diagnosis, which was a long and arduous road that led them to hospitals around the US, including Johns Hopkins, Boston Children's Hospital, Columbia Medical Center, and the University of Chicago Children's Hospital. Caroline was subjected to numerous medical procedures in efforts to determine the diagnosis.

Throughout this time Caroline experienced seizures, periodic paralysis, eating difficulties, developmental delays, and hyper sensitivity to all stimulus, to which she spent hours posturing and crying. In conjunction with AHC, Caroline also has apraxia, ataxia, and cerebral palsy. With time her condition slowly improved, and she now participates in many life activities. Caroline is an extremely happy person who loves being around people; she enjoys music and pop culture, such as watching shows like *The Voice*, dancing, and going to the mall. Currently, she attends a specialized charter school for children with significant disabilities and is cared for in her family home by her parents and other caregivers.

I'm not a quitter, I'm persistent, I have fortitude, and I'm not intimidated...I always go into the IEP meetings with an open

mind and heart, and a positive attitude. But overtime I'd be beaten down. It made me so upset.

This is Caroline's mom explaining her experience at IEP meetings. Tish, a former executive banker, stopped working after 20 years to care for her newborn daughter with complex significant needs. She has been actively involved in schools as the PTA president and as a classroom mom, as well as serving on the Superintendents' Advisory Committee to Improve Exceptional Student Education in one of the top ten largest school districts in the U.S. She has also testified before a House Subcommittee Hearing on the ACE Kids Act (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/546>). Her advocacy role at the school, district, and federal levels demonstrates her commitment to helping children with significant needs. And yet, her experiences in IEP meetings have been met with resistance and negativity. What follows is her account of navigating an educational system, through the IEP process, that undervalued her daughter's educational experience.

Challenges Encountered

The primary obstacle that Tish encountered, from Pre-K to middle school, was getting teachers and administrators to think outside the box when writing IEPs for Caroline. The conventional approach to developing IEPs created problems because it did not allow for teachers to be flexible in meeting her needs. For example, Caroline is an auditory learner and the most effective way to get her to remember things is through music. Though her teachers were aware of her learning style they continued to teach her to identify letters and words in traditional ways, without incorporating music into their lessons. Caroline did not perform in the way they wanted her to which created anxiety and stressful situations. Nevertheless, teachers at the elementary level were still willing to support and provide opportunities for Caroline to learn from and with peers in inclusive settings. At the secondary level, however, there were more obstacles to inclusion. Caroline could not be included in the regular education classroom because the students' academic pace was much too quick for Caroline to

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keep up and the supports and services necessary to be successful in this setting were not included in her IEP. They even had difficulties with Caroline going on field trips because of issues of accessibility. These types of obstacles seemed insurmountable so Tish homeschooled Caroline for three years of middle school. There was a clear difference between Caroline's experience in elementary school and middle school with regard to academic instruction, social opportunities, and inclusion in the regular education classroom.

Another instance that created angst was in writing the IEP goals. These goals were so prescribed that they did not allow for flexibility in teaching them. Tish shared this example: Caroline will identify the numbers 1-10 for 80% of the time over a 6-week period. If the IEP team truly considered Caroline's conditions then this goal would not work. Though Caroline may be able to identify the numbers she may not do it within a given time period or even consistently. Why not instead say that Caroline will learn the concept of numbers? The required criteria and time frame for the IEP goal might be more adaptable in this example because the concept of numbers are part of the standards but does not have any specific associated criteria. Furthermore, when Tish suggested that a goal of, "Caroline will be happy and have friends," the response was: "how are we going to measure that?" While this is a concern from an educational standpoint, from this parent's perspective it does not make sense. Tish said, "I didn't feel the need to have everything measured," but the teachers were, "not interested in a goal that was not measurable because they were held accountable at a higher legislative level." This type of pressure may have restricted expectations and learning opportunities for children with significant needs. Some children have such complicated needs where parents simply want an environment that encourages them to do meaningful things, that is not hindered by macro level pressures.

Me Against Them

Due to the complexities of Caroline's needs, numerous people, including school personnel and specialists, were in attendance at her IEP meetings. IEP meetings were extremely stressful and Tish did not feel that the educators were really trying to understand what was best for Caroline. "I never asked for anything to be done that would be outside of a normal educational environment but the lack of creativity was surprising." She was very involved in Caroline's schooling and educational experiences that she became known as a "high-profile parent." Tish shared that these are

parents who are "educated, informed, and articulate" are unafraid to call the district office or obtain a lawyer to ensure their children are receiving the appropriate services and educational experiences; this sets up an us against them relationship. She realized that she was this type of parent when the principal and high level district administrators were frequently attending her daughter's IEP meetings.

All Tish wanted was to ensure that her daughter had meaningful educational experiences. For Caroline, the purpose of education is for "stimulation, socialization, and to be challenged." Further, she can also "learn about how the world works and how she fits in it." But this proved to be problematic when Tish would prepare for hours for IEP meetings and provide suggestions to "engage Caroline in a productive and healthy learning environment," only to realize that, "they did not really want me to give advice on teaching Caroline." For instance, the school personnel were insistent that they use a Dynavox as an alternative communicative device but Caroline was already able to make her needs and wants known. Instead, Tish suggested at an IEP meeting that an IPAD would be better suitable for her to use and interact in an educational way. However, "they were not open to this suggestion, even though I would have provided the IPAD for her to use." The assertion was, "This is the way we do it. PERIOD."

Many deficit assumptions were made about Caroline which were expressed in the following examples: talking loudly to her (she does not have a hearing impairment), speaking to her in an uncomfortably close proximity (she does not have a vision impairment), and making inappropriate comments in her presence (as though she does not understand what they are saying). Many times, Caroline performed to match their low expectations and teachers were surprised when Tish would say otherwise. She had to prove to the school what Caroline could do. They would always say to her, "we've never heard her (or see her) do that." For example, Caroline would go to school for days and her teacher would report that she did not speak at all. Tish then recorded Caroline speaking at home and shared the recording at school. They were amazed to hear her speaking. Although the teachers had good intentions and wanted to help Caroline, they had low expectations of her capabilities.

Systemic Issues

The nature of Tish's involvement in schools- being PTA president, classroom mom, and a member on the superintendent's

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committee- afforded her a unique opportunity into the inner-workings of schools. In her experience, the IEP meetings were very procedural and compliance-driven, due to the mandates of IDEA. Whenever Tish would question certain aspects of the IEP, such as writing goals, school personnel would say “we are bound by the law to do this. We have to write the IEP this way.” She believes that there is a need to include more flexibility in the process of writing IEPs, especially for children with significant needs. The focus, as Tish has noticed in her experience with Caroline, has been heavily on academics. There should be a better balance between addressing the socialization and academic needs of children with significant needs. When Caroline was in 5th grade, she learned to count from 1 to 100. This was done in a rote way that was boring and disengaging to Caroline. Using music to teach memorization of numbers could have been one way to make learning numbers more exciting for the students in her class. Teachers need to find ways to teach that engage students and make them enthusiastic about learning with each other.

As a parent participant on the superintendent’s committee, Tish felt that “they were saying the right things when they talked about flexibility, creativity, and providing for the child.” However, what was said at the district meetings was incongruent with what was happening in the classroom. There were major issues with implementation of programs or processes. Although principals were provided with information about implementing procedures or processes for students with significant needs, hardly ever in Tish’s experience was this done with fidelity. For example, the district trained the PE teachers on Adapted PE. When Tish volunteered at the school, she noticed on numerous occasions that the children in wheelchairs were sidelined and were not participating in PE activities. “No attempt was made for them to participate.” When she shared this observation at the District committee’s meeting she was told that “the PE teachers were all trained in Adapted PE.” Missing however, was the follow up on the training with the PE teachers. Tish explained that “unless you find a principal with a passion for these kids (children with significant needs), nothing was done.” She recalls that the Exceptional Student Education Specialists at Caroline’s schools were typically requested by principals to perform other duties that took their time away from supporting and providing services to the ESE teachers and their classrooms. Frequently, the ESE Specialists were utilized to substitute for absent regular education teachers. “Continually it was the ESE Specialist selected as the first choice to substitute. Why not someone else? This implies that what the ESE Specialist does is not important.” Furthermore,

when Caroline’s self-contained teachers were absent, substitutes were hardly ever provided for these classrooms. Instead, the paraprofessionals took the responsibility for instructing and taking care of the students until the teachers’ return. “What message does this send to parents and children?” Tish asked. “It says that they [the students] are not valued at this school.”

What Should Parents Do?

Here are some suggestions to help parents navigate the world of IEP meetings.

- ◆ **Do your research:** Read books and articles, search the internet, speak to other parents, and take suggestions to the meetings grounded in the knowledge acquired from the resources that you have accumulated through multiple sources. Justify your ideas.
- ◆ **Invite other professionals:** Bring someone with credibility who can advocate for your child and will provide support and advice. These professionals can help articulate, in the language of educators, the needs and abilities of your child.
- ◆ **Become involved in the school as much as possible:** Get to know the teachers, administrators, other parents, etc. Participate in PTA, SAC, and other committees.
- ◆ **Be realistic about and hold high-expectations for your child’s needs academically and socially:** Understanding the specific needs of your child is important in advocating for the appropriate services and resources to support them.
- ◆ **Remember that the focus of the IEP meeting is your child:** Lay out pictures of your child on the table at the beginning of the meeting as a reminder to everyone.
- ◆ **Make it a flexible document:** Do not be afraid to call IEP meetings throughout the year; it is your right as a parent of a child with a disability.

What Should School Personnel Do?

Here are suggestions for school personnel.

- ◆ **Be open minded:** Parents know their child better than anyone. Listen intently and acknowledge and utilize the parents’ contributions when making educational decisions about their child.
- ◆ **Seek parents’ meaningful input from the start of the meeting:** Begin the IEP meetings with the parents’ sharing their suggestions and concerns.

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- ◆ **Make it a positive process for everyone:** Parents should feel welcomed and respected as valuable members of the IEP team.
- ◆ **Meet the students where they are:** Make learning meaningful to the child, have high expectations of them, and create a community of learners where all are valued. There is no norm.
- ◆ **Try non-traditional approaches to learning:** Do not underestimate the child's abilities and find creative ways to engage the child in learning.
- ◆ **Be flexible with the child's attainment of objectives and goals:** Re-visit them frequently and adjust instruction and supports as needed.
- ◆ **Partnering with Parents:** Engage with parents regularly and communicate about their child's progress and areas of concern. Work together to problem solve to find solutions to ensure that the child's educational experience is successful.

Helpful IEP-Related Websites

- ◆ **IEP Overview:**
<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/iep-overview/>
This website provides a general overview of the IEP including its purpose, development, and components. There are also resources for further information.
- ◆ **What you need to know about IEPs and IEP meetings:**
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/idea/art/iep.roadmap.htm>
This website provides descriptions of the contents of the IEP and the process of the IEP meetings, particularly referencing sections of IDEA.
- ◆ **A Guide to the IEP:**
<https://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html>
This is the guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education regarding the development of the IEP. It is a detailed account of the processes and procedures relating to the IEP.

Final Thoughts

Parents of children with significant needs are important members of IEP teams. Their knowledge about their child(ren) provides an invaluable perspective that may shape the direction of the development and implementation of the IEP. Establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships with parents are critical to providing an educational experience that addresses the specific needs of the individual. Tish aptly sums up the school-parent relationship in this way:

The best outcome is if you work with everyone on the IEP team and find a way to come together and mutually agree upon what is in the best interest of your child... We are all a team. It is not us against them.

About the Author

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Tish West is a Florida native. She received her BFA and MBA from Florida State University. She lives with her husband and daughter Caroline in Tampa, Florida. Since Caroline's birth almost 20 years ago, Tish has been advocating for children's issues.



The IEP as the Gateway to Inclusive Spaces: Engaging Teachers and School Leaders

by Karen Ramlackhan, PhD, University of South Florida

Introduction

The Education for All Handicapped Children's Act enacted in 1975, later renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), mandated the rights of children with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. An important component of this legislation is that of the Individual Education Program, which stipulates the educational programming that is developed to address the specific needs of the child. Every IEP must contain particular information. Specifically required are the student's current level of performance, annual goals, educational progress, special education and related services, accommodations, participation with children without disabilities, participation in state and district assessments, transition service needs (if applicable), age of majority, how progress will be measured, and date of when the services and supports will be provided. These components of the IEP are essential to ensuring that the student is receiving the supports needed to be successful in an educational context.

The IEP and Standards-Based Accountability

Guided by standards-based accountability systems from federal, state, and district mandates, teachers and other members of the IEP team are tasked with aligning goals and objectives within these parameters. When writing IEPs for children with severe disabilities, the focus is on both academic skills and functional skills based on a standards-based curriculum. Concentration should not be on one or the other but about how to use both conjunctively. Some researchers have argued that the priority should be on a functional curriculum for children with severe disabilities (Ayres, Lowrey, Douglas, & Sievers, 2011). Others, have made the case that the general education context is a research-based practice where both access to the general curriculum and embedded functional skills are priorities in order to achieve encouraging educational outcomes for children with severe needs (Jackson, Ryndak, Wehmeyer, 2008-2009).

All too often however, the mandate of the standards-based curriculum is used to justify segregated placement options for students with severe disabilities, funneling them into self-contained classrooms (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Orsati, & Cosier, 2011) to receive primary instruction of specific content and skills related to the general curriculum. This type of instruction often focuses on the basic concepts and skills of the standards implemented with differing levels of complexity, commonly referred to as alternate standards (Quenemoen & Thurlow, 2015). Students are expected to demonstrate progress on these alternate state standards through performance on alternate assessments. Typically, the students taking alternate assessments do not receive academic instruction in the regular education classroom.

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Some general education teachers may not feel prepared to work with students with complex needs because they (1) do not have the knowledge and skills to work with them, or (2) are pressured by the demands already placed on them to meet the standards-based accountability measures for the diverse students within their regular education classrooms. Further, some special education teachers question the appropriateness of the regular education classroom as the place to provide the functional skills and learning activities for students with severe needs, further resulting in self-contained classroom placement for students with severe and complex needs.

Research on the inclusion of children with severe disabilities is resounding (Jackson, Ryndak, Wehmeyer, 2008-2009). Teaching academic skills and using evidence-based practices with children with severe disabilities in the regular education setting demonstrates the learning capabilities of all children in inclusive contexts (Spooner, Knight, Browder, & Smith, 2012). Students have shown growth in academic content in the general classroom (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Hudson, Browder, & Wood, 2013). Furthermore, research also establishes that students with severe disabilities learn communication, social, and employment skills in these settings (Kurth, Morningstar, & Kozleski, 2014).

My Experience as an Educator

My experiences as a former special education teacher have shaped my views and perspectives about how the IEP could be used to provide meaningful educational experiences for children with severe disabilities. From the onset of my K-12 teaching career, I realized the importance of the IEP, not only for a child's educational experience, but also for teacher and specialists' responsibilities and the school's accountability in providing an appropriate and meaningful education. Starting with my first year as a teacher onwards, the IEP process- from development to implementation- was procedural and compliance-driven. Specific components had to be addressed, goals had to be written with particular specificity, evaluative measures had to be explained and justified, and certain dates and codes had to match those in the data collecting mechanisms in schools and within the district. I recall numerous meetings where the special education teachers at one of the schools I taught in were continually reminded that the school, due to housing self-contained classrooms for children with severe disabilities, could be audited the next year. It was a constant reminder that all i's must be dotted and t's crossed in relation to IEP related documentation. This technical mentality undergirded

and directed all aspects of the IEP process, regardless of the school setting.

The IEP is the mechanism that stipulates the supports and services required to ensure student success within all schooling environments, including the inclusive context. We must move beyond a primary focus on procedural compliance towards one of meaningful development and implementation. Collaboration and shared ownership among the faculty and staff is necessary and continual communication is warranted to address the diverse needs of the students. In a qualitative study I conducted focused on inclusion, one assistant principal shared:

That's what I want classroom teachers to know: the accommodations, the goals, all of those things that these kids are working on. Because that's your responsibility too. You should be creating those together with the [special education] teacher.

For the students with severe disabilities to be successful in a regular education classroom, the teachers must work together to develop and provide the supports and services specified on the IEP. Further, parents must be collaborative and equal members of this partnership. Parents provide their unique expertise, knowledge and experiences with the group so that all perspectives and information are utilized in the IEP process.

The IEP meetings, in many cases, is flawed with respect to parental involvement. Sometimes the school (i.e. members of the IEP team) does not meaningfully engage parents. Other times, parents may feel intimidated because school personnel use specialized vocabulary that is unfamiliar, without any explanation. Furthermore, the power dynamics between the school and parent may be amplified when parents share their opinions about their child's education and/or question the teachers and service providers. There may even be resistance from school personnel to collaborate with parents. I recall one example when I was a self-contained teacher: One student's parents were deeply unsatisfied with their child's special education teacher and requested for her to be placed in my classroom. Throughout the year, I established and maintained a collaborative and supportive relationship with these parents. Their child made tremendous academic, social, and communication gains. We frequently re-visited the IEP and made changes to address their child's needs. We were flexible and adapted instruction and supports regularly. When this family had to move, we held an additional IEP meeting and invited the special education personnel from the new school. At that meeting

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The IEP as the Gateway to Inclusive Spaces: Engaging Teachers and School Leaders

I witnessed a special education specialist harshly explain to the parents that their child would be with a teacher who would not be as adaptable or collaborative as me. She was abrasive with her words and did not attempt to speak with the parents as partners. All too often, this happens. I do not know if this child continued to progress at the same rate, but worry that without the partnership between school personnel and parents she didn't. Parents are valuable members of IEP teams and need to be treated as such.

A Recent Study

Recently, I conducted a study with district and school administrators that focused on the construction of policies, procedures, and practices regarding inclusive education of children with disabilities within the district. In this study, some of the school administrators discussed the challenges with providing supports and services to children with severe needs. One elementary school principal shared her views about educating children with severe disabilities and her personal experience that shaped her thinking:

I think you need to have an inclusive environment even for kids with severe cognitive disabilities. I'll tell you a story. My son, he's 30 years old now, but when he was in kindergarten, he came home every day and talked about Susie. Her favorite color is this. Her favorite food is that. And then a few years later, Susie was sent to my school where I taught. Susie was in a wheelchair and was profoundly handicapped and used a storyboard to talk. Now did my son say that? No. I had no idea... All I knew is that she was a nice little kindergarten girl that loved yellow, that my son liked. So ideally, would we like that for all kids? Yes. Do I understand that what Susie needed might be different than what other kids needed? It would be nice if we can provide that in a [neighborhood] school environment, ideally in the future.

Unfortunately, in this particular school district, students with severe disabilities were placed in separate schools or segregated settings within neighborhood schools. Due to district programming policy, this principal did not have the opportunity to have children with severe disabilities in her school, though she would have welcomed them with open arms. Another principal in this school district, who did have students with severe disabilities, explained the mindset needed to create a schooling culture that values everyone.

A big barrier is when people think that inclusion has a model to

follow, when there isn't. It's the frame of mind about what type of problem solving is going on in the building to make sure you're meeting all kids' needs... You have to have the right people who can differentiate and teach. The real advantage to inclusion is teaching tolerance and diversity.

This principal has decades of leadership experience working in multiple schools in this district that housed a variety of service delivery models for children with disabilities. She emphatically shared, "It is also important as a leader to know what goes into an IEP, the way the goals are written, (because) when it comes down to it, it's the IEP that monitors the progress." She places importance on understanding the components of the IEP as a school leader, along with creating a learning community and cultural space that values all students. This type of leader fosters a schooling environment that is collaborative and engaging.

How to Create Communities of Engagement and Collaboration

Suggestions for Leaders/Administrators:

- ◆ Create a school culture that values the differences of all students.
- ◆ Provide professional development opportunities for regular education and special education teacher to focus on working with children with severe disabilities collaboratively.
- ◆ Create a master schedule that ensures teachers have time to collaborate and plan the appropriate instruction and supports.
- ◆ Welcome and make deliberate efforts to include parents of children with severe disabilities to all school events.
- ◆ Work productively with parents to ensure that the appropriate supports and services are provided.
- ◆ Provide ongoing support and resources to teachers and school personnel on how to meaningfully educate students with severe disabilities within general education and natural learning environments.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- ◆ Create meaningful relationships with parents. Openly communicate about their child and work together to support their child.
- ◆ Encourage and value parents' input in IEP meetings. Hear them first.

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Collaborate with colleagues, specialists, and other personnel to provide the specified supports and services.

- ◆ Be flexible and make adaptations to the IEP and instructional programming as needed throughout the year. Always involve parents' in the decision-making process.
- ◆ Use creative instructional approaches to address students' needs. Think about what works for that particular child. Use purposeful assistive technology as needed.
- ◆ Provide standards based accommodations and modifications so students can thrive.
- ◆ Embed functional skills within the standards based curriculum, as needed.
- ◆ Gain further knowledge through professional development, reading articles and books related to working with children with diverse and severe needs.

Concluding Remarks

Children with severe disabilities make academic and functional progress in inclusive settings. The research is clear in demonstrating the benefits of including children with severe

disabilities in the regular education classroom. The development and implementation of the IEP is integral to the educational and functional success that children with complex needs have in schools. School districts, school leaders, and teachers must create learning environments that welcome and value all children and utilize the IEP as a collaborative and flexible tool to ensure that children with disabilities are recipients of the appropriate supports and services needed to be successful within general education and other natural and authentic learning environments.

About the Author

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Functional Communication in the Inclusive Classroom

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Imagine a classroom filled with twenty-five fourth graders, the majority of the students are verbal communicators, one student has physical disabilities, and another student has Rett Syndrome. The nine-year old girl, diagnosed at a young age with Rett Syndrome, has been in an inclusive classroom since kindergarten. This girl uses a Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Display (PODD) communication book and an eye gaze tool to functionally communicate with her family and peers. The PODD communication book is a form of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), which she uses for both academic and social purposes. In a recent classroom activity to raise awareness about Rett Syndrome, each student was given a PODD book with which to communicate. Patty, the parent of the girl with Rett Syndrome, reported on this experience:

Amazing morning with our daughter and her 4th grade class, as they had a Rett Awareness day. I shared a bit about Rett, “gave” the class Rett and then got kids into small groups to communicate with one another using our daughter’s PODD books. Good thing we have a collection of books she’s outgrown. Some were getting frustrated with not finding the words or making mistakes. At one point, a group decided it might just be better to have our daughter do it, so they turned to her. (Personal communication, October 24, 2016)

Though the scenario described above reflects a heartwarming day in an inclusive classroom, there is no doubt that there have been many ups and downs in the journey of this child and her

family. Successfully using functional communication through her PODD books took perseverance and dedication from a team of supporters. This young lady had family support, support of therapists and educational staff, consultation from speech-language pathologists dedicated to augmentative communication systems, and a school district that



accepted inclusion and expected inclusionary practices to succeed in their schools. Part of best practice for inclusive education is writing Individual Education Programs (IEPs) (including present level of performance, goals, supplementary aids, and services) that leverage functional communication and address appropriate standards, which takes time and a team approach.

Though it is a tremendous effort that requires effective collaboration, the utilization of functional communication (regardless of the tool used) is imperative to the success of students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom. The remainder of this article will review a) standards that should be considered when writing functional communication IEP goals, the present level of educational performance, and supplemental aides and services, b) stages of functional communication, and c) sample functional communication goals for an inclusive setting. The article will end with the perspective of families and teachers who benefit from functional communication use in the classroom.

Standards for Writing Functional Communication Goals in Individualized Education Programs

There are many standards that may be used to guide instruction, and for the purpose of this article, we will reference the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS are meant to provide

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support for an inclusive setting for students with disabilities because of the need to maintain the rigor and high expectation of the grade level. By collaborating, an IEP team will develop an accurate and detailed present level of performance thereby pinpointing strengths and weaknesses related to his or her grade level. By identifying communication and academic strengths and weaknesses, some students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will require substantial speech and language, motor, and academic supports and accommodations to have meaningful access to some of the standards in both instruction and assessment. The supports and accommodations written in the IEP should ensure that students receive access to multiple modes of learning and opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, but retain the rigor and high expectations of the CCSS. For direction on using the CCSS to guide IEP goals, it is helpful to look at the document within the standards that discuss application to students with disabilities. According to the CCSS, students with disabilities should be taught using Universal Design for Learning, which allows students to respond and express understanding in many ways. One of the ways that students can access the CCSS and express understanding is through functional communication.

Functional Communication

Various groups interpret functional communication differently. For the purpose of this article, the American Speech Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) defines functional communication as behaviors that express wants, needs, feelings, and preferences in order for others to understand the individual who wishes to communicate (see <http://www.asha.org/NJC/Definition-of-Communication-and-Appropriate-Targets/>).

Functional communication, as we are defining here is broader than Functional Communication Training (FCT), which is often used with children who have behavioral challenges along with a diagnosed disability, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Most children are able to communicate their basic wants and needs within the first year of life using gestures. Then communication continues to develop verbally into words, phrases, and sentences as the child grows (see <https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/functional-communication/>). Functional communication can be divided into levels or phases of language from Early Language to Advanced Language Use. The child moves from refining language, exploring language with the use of early grammatical patterns, emerging language for learning, consolidating language for learning, extending language for learning, using language proficiently, and finally advanced

language use. From a different perspective, Barty, Caynes, and Johnston (2016) classify functional communication levels according to how independently and efficiently a person can express him or herself. AAC tools can be used to facilitate functional communication across these phases or levels.



Regardless of the classification system used, an important step in leveraging functional communication in the classroom is to identify a student's phase of language development. Determining the phase of language development will assist in developing the communication goals for each student identified with a language delay. The *Early Functional Communication Profile* (Jensen, 2012) is a tool that provides three areas of consideration for the dynamic assessment of social communication disorders, and can help to identify the phase of functional language development. The areas explored include joint attention, social interaction, and communicative intent, which all come together to communicate effectively. The level or phase of functional communication, as well as joint attention, social interaction, and communicative intent should be considered when writing a present level of performance and drafting functional communication goals in an IEP.

Sample Functional Communication Goals

Focusing on rigorous standards (CCSS is one example), and attempting to align IEP goals with these standards, while at the same time considering functional communication, is no small task. Luckily, the United States Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), provides guiding documents. One such document provides a seven-step guide to writing standards-based IEP goals (Holbrook, 2007), which provides question prompts to walk the IEP team through goal writing.

More specifically related to the IEP goal writing, Pretti-Frontczak and Bricker (2000) advise that quality IEP goals be based on the following five dimensions: (a) functionality, (b) generality, (c) instructional context, (d) measurability, and (e) hierarchical relationship. Functionality refers to the usefulness of a goal in the

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student's daily classroom functioning. Generalizing skills across more than one dimension of a skill rather than goals that are too specific is advised in writing IEP goals. The instructional context indicates that the targeted goal can be carried out over several natural environments, not just the classroom. Goals must be observable, therefore measurable. Finally, the objectives written for each goal should be building blocks for an achievable goal, which is important to remember when relating goals to grade-level standards. In order to layer functional communication goals into this goal writing process, the team should consider how the student will receive the content, will interact with the content, and will respond to the content (or be assessed). Through these avenues of access, as well as a descriptive present level of educational performance, functional communication goals can be written. In addition to the functional communication goals, the team needs to determine if there are supplementary aides and services necessary to give the student access to their communication.

The first goal highlights functionality and generality (Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000), as discussed above. A collaboration goal allows any student to function in an inclusive setting, and can be addressed during any collaborative classroom activity, regardless of content or grade level. If needed, this goal could relate to CCSS Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening, which apply from Kindergarten to Grade 12: Comprehension and Collaboration.

1. At the end of nine-weeks, will use a picture exchange system to negotiate and collaborate within interactions with peers during grade level content centered activities in 8/10 opportunities. (CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.CCRA.SL1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively).

A similar goal could be written for the early childhood level by changing the setting from a grade level activity to requesting turns during cooperative play with adult guidance in 3 of 4 opportunities.

2. The second goal highlights instructional context and hierarchical relationship (Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000), as it can be addressed across contexts (not just the classroom), and could be broken down into hierarchical benchmarks. For example, the IEP team could emphasize a small set of relative pronouns and a small set of familiar verbs as a part of working toward the following standard grade-level standard for a fourth-grade student. Grade 4 (English Language Arts):

At the end of nine weeks, will use a communication book to express herself using a predetermined set of relative pronouns and progressive -ing words in 8/10 opportunities. (Fourth Grade English Language Arts (ELA) Conventions of Standard English: CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.L.4.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.)

The third goal, written for an adolescent, highlights functionality, generality, and instructional context (Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000). The goal is useful, can cross contexts (i.e., environments) in the student's life, and addresses more than dimension of visual information. If desired, the IEP team could also break this goal up into hierarchical benchmarks as discussed by Pretti-Frontczak and Bricker (2000), as the student works toward this Grade 8 standard.

3. Grade 8 (History/Social Studies): By the end of 18 weeks, will use eye gaze to locate key information in charts, directories, maps, menus and schedules without assistance in 8/10 opportunities. (Eighth Grade Social Studies: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts. prior knowledge or opinions).

It is also important that all three of these goals are observable and measurable. Notice that all of the goals have a determined time frame (nine or 18 weeks), and a measurable rate (successful number of opportunities). When considering these factors, it is essential to think about the multiple dimensions and complexity of the goal. Finally, the last two goals relate to grade-level CCSS standards (i.e., Grade 4 English Language Arts and Grade 8 Social Studies), while also allowing the student to work toward the goal using a functional communication tool (i.e., the communication book or eye gaze). Drafting and agreeing on IEP goals takes collaboration between families as well as school staff; therefore family beliefs about functional communication are discussed next.

Family Beliefs

Functional communication makes an incredible difference in the lives of children in inclusive classrooms. Often functional communication in the classroom is realized through the use of AAC systems such as the PODD used in the scenario at the beginning of this article. This device can be an electronic communication board, or a communication book. An important part of using AAC in an inclusive classroom is for other students in the classroom to be comfortable exchanging information and

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ideas with the AAC user. Introducing and using AAC in the classroom can be a journey for all involved, but makes an incredible difference in the lives of students and their families. To generalize use, it is also important for families to use the AAC system at home, which is why

considering family beliefs is very important to the process.

To qualitatively delve into family beliefs, Patty was willing to share her family's journey of functional communication in her daughter's classroom. From the beginning of their journey, the family used a vision statement to help them guide school staff and IEP meetings. The vision statement is as follows:

Through technology and adaptations, our daughter will demonstrate growth in all areas so she is able to access her skills. She will apply these skills to her learning environment at a similar level as her peers. Our daughter will participate in meaningful social activities providing opportunities to develop lasting successful, meaningful friendships throughout her school years. We want our daughter to feel valued and develop a love of school and learning, with the belief that she can and will succeed (Personal communication, November 7, 2016).

This family has strong convictions about their daughter's need to use functional communication socially in order to be successful in the classroom, especially because their child has typical cognition, but is unable to physically speak:

We feel it is imperative to provide her sufficient access to and meaningful practice with communication to continue to participate in all areas of her school experience and do things such as run for student council, writing her own speech, and speaking to the judges about her interest fair project. Her development of communication has helped her show the world just how much she has to offer. Without the support and motivation of her peers, I don't believe she would be where she is today. Communication with friends, either around school, or for fun, is meaningful and motivating (Personal communication, November 7, 2016).

In addition to the peer support and motivation, this family acknowledges the need for the classroom staff to support the use of an alternative communication system:

Over the years, in an inclusion model, the special education aides, who have spent the most classroom time with our daughter, have helped to facilitate communication between our daughter, her peers, and adults as well. Our daughter engages with others when they are "speaking the same language as her" (Personal communication, November 7, 2016).

Following the classroom Rett Awareness activity described in the beginning of the article, Patty had the following reaction:

We spend a tremendous amount of time and energy working to advocate for our daughter. Sometimes it is tough, and sometimes we feel like throwing in the towel, but today, I saw how amazing her peers and staff are and will cherish this day for quite some time! (Personal communication, October 24, 2016).

Another example of a family's belief in the team approach to functional communication is Jenny and Will. Will has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). He uses an iPad with an app, Choiceworks, to assist him in communicating (see <http://www.beevisual.com/>). Jenny, Will's mother, advocated for Will to attend his neighborhood school. Will receives cross-categorical (CC) support for his academics, speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy. His speech language pathologist describes his present level of academic performance as follows:

Will is a multimodal communicator because he uses multiple means, such as sign language and verbal words, to communicate with others. However, his motivation and intent to use these means has been limited in the school setting. The request "Say... Will" has been faded to tease out Will's echolalia and distinguish it from his intent to engage in a conversational turn. Instead, Will has begun to use low-tech communication boards with functional vocabulary and pictures to initiate conversational turns. Having access to these boards provides picture representations and written words, which give context to communication situations and encourage Will to verbally use his own words. This technique is called aided language stimulation.

Jenny provided the following statement to describe Will's school team:

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The neighborhood school is truly a community that is kind, accepting, and compassionate. Team Will is awesome! The CC teacher is very knowledgeable and passionate about her job. She is always willing to try new things and think outside the box. She is willing and happy to help classroom teachers implement different ideas with the included students. The classroom teachers are willing to work together with the Special Ed team to make sure that they are all doing what is best for each child. His speech and OT are just as involved in his growth. This year his speech teacher helped him prepare for a speech he had to give in front of his whole class. This was way out of Will's comfort zone. She created a social story and had him practice at school (during his speech time and whenever she had extra time) and sent one home. He did it all by himself in front of his whole class. His OT got the [school] district to put Choiceworks on his personal iPad. (Personal communication, January 23, 2017).

The experiences of both families illustrate successful cases of inclusion wherein the families and the school and district staff spend a lot of time and effort communicating, planning, and coordinating. This time and effort, (not without challenges) has led to successful classroom experiences using functional communication; this is also due to the innate beliefs that the classroom teachers have about functional communication and inclusion.

Teacher Beliefs

Research suggests that school staff and teacher beliefs are central to the success of inclusive practices in the classroom (Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008), which we would argue, also includes functional communication practices. In order to integrate functional communication tools in an inclusive classroom, teachers require professional development and training around the specific tools being used. Teachers that are successful in inclusive classrooms tend to be teachers that are willing to participate in such training. An international report of teacher beliefs found that teachers who participate in professional development also have a broader variety of teaching practices and are more likely to collaborate with others (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009), which is important for inclusive practice. As seen in the scenarios above, collaboration between the families and schools made the included children successful in the classroom. The teachers, aides, specialists, and families had to undergo training, be willing to collaborate, and be persistent with implementation in order to make progress and find success.

The earlier this process can begin in the education of a child with disabilities, the better.

Will (discussed above) has been included in regular education beginning in his four-year-old kindergarten year. Looking to the earliest years, a duo of teachers in an inclusive four-year-old Kindergarten classroom had the following to say regarding challenges and successes of inclusion from their own experiences.

In order for inclusion practices to work in this building, planning and collaboration are key components. Training and an extra set of hands during structured times is necessary to avoid disruptions and ensure attention to task. Because our students are so young, they are often novice users and are experimenting with voice output devices or communication books, unless someone is assisting them in using the communication system appropriately. The benefits of inclusionary practices at this early level is the ability to create discussions and have teachable moments regarding awareness, acceptance, and empathy towards others who are different from each us (Mary and Darcie, personal communication, November 11, 2016).

Will's current cross categorical teacher provide the following statement to describe how she is able to make inclusion work and why she finds inclusion socially necessary for her students:

I believe for a student to be successful in an inclusive school setting, the student must have the unconditional support of a team of staff who work towards bringing out the most in the child. I always look for the small successes and look at them as being really significant. These are the building blocks. When I get the first glimpse of an expectation being met, I realize we are one step closer to where we are going. There needs to be the belief by those who work with the child that there is so much more that needs to be done to assist the child and we continually need to educate ourselves to open windows to allow us to make discoveries. I find the most amazing piece [of inclusion] is watching the child's peers find ways to interact and develop a friendship with the child. The essence of the process is the realization that the child is a part of the school community and we can make this happen for them (Diane, personal communication, January 24, 2017).

Another teacher, Michelle, who is an Inclusive Kindergarten Teacher, holds a strong belief in inclusion, which is realized in her success and expertise. She offered observations and practical tips based on her successful experiences including children using functional communication.

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- ◆ Pair the included student with a buddy who has stronger communication skills. The modeling that the peer provides makes a big difference. This is called purposeful partnering.
- ◆ One of the challenges is that the student being included may lack confidence in using his or her functional communication system, so pairing with a general education peer helps with confidence.
- ◆ Having an adult (aide) assigned to each inclusive classroom really helps to make inclusion successful.
- ◆ Near the semester, if possible, start doing a gradual release (adults back off, aides do not sit next to child and float around the room instead). This helps when students have confidence but do not have independence (Personal communication, January 23, 2017).
- ◆ Time for team meetings with staff supporting students in inclusion being built into programming and or Professional Learning Communities. Ideally this would include funding for an Educational Assistant directly working with the student.
- ◆ Ensure staff supports, program modifications and student supports are written into the IEP and that these are provided with fidelity.
- ◆ Provide professional development based on needs of that school. Recommend that special educators and general educators participate in a needs-based assessment to determine barriers or areas to develop.
- ◆ Principal could also serve as advocate for special educational funding/resources at a district or state level (Jacqueline, personal communication, January 24, 2017)

Similar to teachers' views, as a speech language pathologist, the opportunities for functional communication that are offered to students in an inclusive setting are valuable. In order to have successes in inclusion there are some key factors to consider from the standpoint of a speech language pathologist.

In order for inclusion to be successful, much of the work has to be front-end loaded. Communication boards, PECS pictures, or voice output devices for the student must be made or programmed prior to the unit or event. It is ideal to have opportunities for individual or small group practice prior to the whole class experience. Families must be supportive of the idea of using AAC to ensure carryover to activities outside of the classroom as well as reducing overall frustration in regards to communication. The reason I value inclusion is because although I may lay the framework for successful communication, the opportunities for natural communication with peers is a much larger motivator than I can ever provide in therapy (Personal communication, November 11, 2017).

As teachers and therapists mention the need for collaboration, team planning, and support of educational assistants, we turn to administration to provide support to make the inclusive setting possible. An elementary school principal offered insight on how she envisions administrative support for inclusion within an elementary school.

Based on the comments made, inclusion works if parents and school personnel have shared beliefs, are able to work together to define the student's needs in the present level of educational performance, write measurable and obtainable goals, and identify the supplementary aids and services necessary to meet those goals. As referenced above by parents Patty and Jenny, their children are motivated to communicate, especially with peers. With regards to all children, this motivation should reveal itself with peer and general education support when the appropriate materials are available to the included student.

Conclusion

As shown above, successful inclusive practice often requires the use of functional communication with students who have severe disabilities or communication disorders. It is important that teams work together to know grade level standards, and follow appropriate steps to collaboratively implement full accurate IEPs that relate to such standards. The collaboration required between therapists, special education teachers, general education teachers, administrators, and families is time consuming but critical to the success of the IEP. The beliefs of families and teachers are intimately tied to the success of inclusive practice. No one is saying that it is easy; on the contrary, it takes significant time and effort, but the use of functional communication in an inclusive classroom can open doors to academic achievement and social relationships that make an immeasurable positive impact in the lives of children with disabilities and their families.

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Resources

- ◆ American Speech Language and Hearing Association.
<http://www.asha.org/>
Organization that oversees Speech and Language Pathologists and Audiologists. The website has many evidence-based resources for language development, language disorders, and functional communication.
- ◆ Choiceworks app for visual organization.
<http://www.beevisual.com/>
The website that explains this Microsoft app for the iPad that uses pictures and choices and is meant to help children with self-management and communication.
- ◆ Life with Rett Syndrome – School and Day Programs.
<http://www.rett Syndrome.org/for-families/school-and-day-programs>
Sponsored by the International Rett Syndrome Foundation, this website is a resource for parents of children with Rett Syndrome, and has many useful tools related to education and advocacy.
- ◆ Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).
<http://www.pecsusa.com/pecs.php>
PECS is a system for functional communication. The official PECS website, a resource for more information, connects to training opportunities and products.

- ◆ Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Display (PODD) Communication Book.
<http://www.spectronics.com.au/product/pragmatic-organisation-dynamic-display-podd-communication-books-direct-access-templates>
A link to explore, learn about, and purchase a PODD book.
- ◆ Speech and Language Kids.
<https://www.speechandlanguagekids.com/functional-communication/>
Explains and explores functional communication, as well as offering resources and support. Useful for parents, special education teachers, and therapists.

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Standards Based IEPs—Are They Important and What Should Be In Them?

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You teach a student who has extensive support needs (ESN). The student's math, reading, and writing skills are well below grade level and she or he may still be building a systematic communication system. It may seem unrealistic to write a standards-based Individualized Education Plan (IEP), yet research and practice has shown that students, including those with ESN are able to learn grade level content. Indeed, one thing we have consistently learned from implementing alternate assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities is that, historically, we have not provided many opportunities for these students to learn grade level aligned content (Taub, McCord, & Ryndak, in press), but when we do, they make progress many did not expect. Additionally, teaching and supporting the general curriculum as defined by standards is the legal expectation.

In November, 2015, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) released a letter to clarify Free and Appropriate Public Education that provided some additional information about standards based IEPs. In this guidance the US Department of Education (USDOE) reiterated some key points:

1. All students should have access to and make progress in “the same curriculum as for nondisabled children” (and they defined that curriculum as...”the curriculum that is based on a State’s academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled.” US DOE, 2015, p. 3).

2. With appropriate, instruction, services, and supports, all students may make academic progress.
3. Additionally, low expectations can lead to low outcomes.

This means that all students, including those with ESN, should have annual “IEP goals...aligned with state academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled” (US DOE, 2015, p. 4).

So, two questions arise: 1) Why in the world would you do this? and 2) How in the world would you do this?

Why Standards-Based IEPs?

There is federal and legal guidance indicating the importance of standards-based IEPs, but what does that really mean? I have a student with “*extensive support needs.*” What does a standards-based IEP do for my student?! Standards based IEPs have the potential to support inclusive practices and help students have opportunities to learn.

As two parents put it:

When you are the parent of a child with complex support needs there are often 101 things that you could be working on and sometimes it's difficult to know where to focus your efforts. But in my opinion, all of these things have to be viewed within the context of helping the child be successful with a curriculum that is age appropriate. Standards based IEPs help ensure that my son has a certain knowledge base in common with his non-disabled peers and that is important both academically and socially. For example, participating in the 8th grade civics curriculum, adapted to his needs, allows him to participate in the school and community discussions around the election and will help him fully exercise his civic duties when he turns 18 (C, Stephan, personal communication, November 3, 2016)

Standards based IEPs would encourage them to be in the general classroom environment because you'd be aligned with their curriculum. It would just have everyone on the same page: how

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can we modify this curriculum instead of introducing something different. Without it (standards based IEPs), they don't have the same sense of belonging that they are doing the same things (A, Thurmon, personal communication, November 3, 2016).

For so many parents, they have seen the same topics, and in some cases even the same worksheets, come home year after year after year—this practice does not mirror a standards-based education because no one should be working on the same standards every year of their educational career. In fact, this practice also limits students' opportunity to learn because there may be other ways to help a student move forward, engage his/her interest, and build self-advocacy skills. For instance, one parent talked about the fact that throughout high school, her daughter was still working on counting change. Yet, rather than continuing to work on a skill that she has been trying to master since first grade, it is time to look at other ways to achieve the goal of financial independence, such as apps, debit cards, or other means of using money. If this student had a grade-aligned, standards-based IEP, she would be able to move onto other skills and concepts, have more opportunities to work with her peers, and practice true functional skills for this day and age, because the goals would have to change at a minimum from grade band to grade band, if not from year to year.

How To Write Standards-Based IEPs

Each state has its own guidance for how to write standards-based IEPs. The new guidance from OSEP has pushed many states that used to allow standards-based IEPs to be aligned to any grade level standard to now require IEPs to be aligned to the grade level in which the student is enrolled (e.g., Utah State Office of Education). Thus, it is technically not acceptable to have a 16-year-old working on a kindergarten standard. However, some states consider alignment to their extended standards as the “grade level” (e.g., Tennessee). While this may be technically sound, it is necessary to evaluate the degree of alignment the extended standards have with the general standards because with each step removed from the state adopted general standards, the student is further removed from the same grade level curriculum. Thus, if a state's extended standards are repetitive or vague from grade to grade, or from grade band to grade band, it is possible for a student to be working on identical work year after year, yet still be “aligned” to grade level standards. Thus, it is not enough to be familiar with the standards within a single grade. Educators, IEP team members, and advocates must have a general idea of how

standards or extended standards progress from one grade/grade band to the next.

Does this mean that speech and language, motor, social, or even foundational goals, such as number identification should not be included? No! These goals remain potentially important for students to have as a part of their IEP. We recommend three types of standards-based goals be written in IEPs in various combinations to fulfill the federal expectations. When thinking through goals, IEP teams should consider which of the three type of goals would be most appropriate for the skill being focused on with a strong rationale of how it relates to the child's progress in the general curriculum.

These three types of goals are goals that:

1. Relate directly to grade level standards
2. Relate directly to content area foundational skills that may be embedded within grade-level instruction
3. Address communication, social, motor, and behavioral skills that facilitate participation in general education instruction

All three of these goals may be an important part of a student's IEP. To write any of these goals, first choose a standard. Examples for each of the following types of goals will be based on the CCSS 8th grade standard 8.G.A.2. Understand that a two-dimensional figure is congruent to another if the second can be obtained from the first by a sequence of rotations, reflections, and translations; given two congruent figures, describe a sequence that exhibits the congruence between them

Steps for writing goals that relate directly to grade-level standard

Our experience reinforces the notion put forth by Samuels (2012), that special education teachers need a deep understanding of content standards in each grade before they can effectively write IEP goals based upon the grade-level standards. Strong standards spiral from grade to grade, building from previous years' content and skills. Teachers must pinpoint this progression so IEP goals highlight the new information for each grade and support continued student learning. Otherwise, standards based IEPs may become repetitive with the same goals repeated year after year. Standards should be chosen because they are emphasized in the grade-level curriculum, spiral across grades, or they are prioritized for an individual student.

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The IEP team would:

1. Break the standard into smaller chunks (the smaller skills and concepts that directly lead to the larger standard; for example, in the standard above, the chunks are the three types of transformations and the concept of congruency).
2. Decide which chunk(s) would be most important for the student to achieve (using that same standard [8.G.A.2], instruction for a student may be concentrated on one of the transformations rather than all three).
3. Specify the conditions and criteria required for the student to demonstrate achievement (for example, conditions: using cardstock shapes between 4 and 6 inches in size; criteria: 75% of the time).

Steps for writing goals that relate directly to foundational skills

IEP goals that relate to foundational skills are vital for students with complex instructional needs. These goals may include things such as one-to-one correspondence, reading, or other skills that are important for students to learn and develop but may not be considered “on grade level” instruction. These skills have been successfully taught embedded within standards-based instruction and such instruction may help students generalize these skills (e.g., Hunt, McDonnell and Crockett, 2014). In other words, teaching students foundational skills such as counting does not have to be done in isolation, but can be part of grade-level instruction in the general education setting.

To create these types of goals, the IEP team would

1. Identify foundational skills essential to one or more of the chunks of the standard (for example, the foundational skills necessary for work on transformations include skills such as “same/different”, identifying shapes, and counting).
2. Decide what skill(s) would be the most desirable for the student to achieve (instruction for a particular student may be concentrated on one, two, or all three of the foundational skills identified in the previous step).
3. Specify the conditions and criteria required for the student to demonstrate achievement (for example, conditions: identify from a field of three [one correct answer and two plausible distracters; criteria: 3 out of 4 times for 2 consecutive days).

Steps for writing goals that relate to communication, social skills, behavior, etc.

Goals related to social skills, communication, behavior, etc. are vital parts of helping students access the curriculum, however, they do not need to be achieved prior to students getting access to the curriculum. These goals may be embedded within grade-level instruction and used to support standards-based instruction. In fact, teaching these goals within standards based instruction with their typical peers may be more meaningful than teaching these goals in isolated settings and lessons. The IEP team would

1. Identify what skill the student needs in order to participate most meaningfully in the general curriculum (for example, the student will use a communication system to ask and respond to questions). If an IEP team wants to be very clear about the context within which communicative systems should be practiced, they may write a goal such as, the student will use a communication system to ask and respond to grade-level content questions)
2. Specify the conditions and criteria required for the student to demonstrate achievement (for example, conditions: using a rotary scanner activated by her cheek switch; criteria: give an answer within 15 seconds after request 80% of the time for one week).

Conclusion

Standards-based IEPs are the federal expectation, but more than that, they provide another means for parents and educators to support inclusive practices for all students. If students are not working on the same content and skills it is much easier for some to justify separate classrooms and schools. It is important to remember that if students do not have an opportunity to learn, then they cannot be expected to demonstrate knowledge. And, an opportunity to learn means that students have instruction that is aligned to the state adopted grade-level standards. Instruction must include time to learn, ways for the student to engage in learning, and quality instruction related to the standards. Research has consistently shown that these components more often occur in general education settings than in segregated ones (Taub, McCord, & Ryndak, in press; Wehmeyer, M.L., Lattin, D.L., Lapp-Rincker, G., & Agran, M. (2003)). Without all of these components, students have not truly been provided with

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Transformational Change in Avalon (BOP) Inc: "Don't look back we are not going that way"

an opportunity to learn. We cannot accurately say a student has not learned something if the student has never been given a true chance to learn it.

As parent and advocate put it,

Standards-based IEPs are one more thread in an individualized program to knit together an inclusive education experience for students, even those students with the most significant impact of disability. When IEP goals are written with a clear and direct link to the grade-level curriculum every IEP team member is responsible for insuring access to that curriculum, including the families and the student. (J. Stonemeier, personal communication, November, 5, 2016)

About the Authors

Debbie Taub, PhD has designed, implemented, and evaluated alternate assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities, developed Universal Design of Learning (UDL) and standards-based curricula and instruction, and conducted validity and alignment evaluations. This work is informed by her experiences as a classroom teacher and school reform specialist. She



has experience building curricula that are universally designed and accessible for all students, helping schools and district meet state and federal requirements through teacher and student centered reform, and supporting educators as they make grade level content accessible for students with complex needs. She has contributed journal articles, book chapters, and numerous professional development trainings to the field of educating children with complex needs, and has presented internationally on working with students who have autism.

Michael Burdge, M.Sp.Ed. was a teacher for 25 years, beginning his career at a school for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Over time, he was able to initiate inclusionary programs in several public schools across the country. He was awarded the Stella A. Edwards Teacher of the Year award in 1996, and the Ashland Oil Teacher Achievement award in 1997. Mike was an adjunct professor of special education at the University of Cincinnati and the College of Mount Saint Joseph. He serves on expert panels for several states, and has played key roles in a number of Enhanced Assessment Grants. He is a regular presenter at conferences hosted by CCSSO, CEC, NCEO, TASH, and various OSEP-funded Regional Resource Centers, and has been a contributing author to several texts.



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Use of Legally Compliant IEPs for Inclusive Programming

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The purpose of this article is to review major components of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) from the perspective that the IEP process serves to facilitate inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities. The IEP is a legally binding contractual agreement between a school district and a family, thus it is imperative for the process to be procedurally compliant and completed in a substantively meaningful manner consistent with the six key foundational principles of special education law (Turnbull, Stowe, & Huerta, 2007). An IEP is one of the foundational principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, and this article will primarily focus on three legal criteria needed to develop a meaningful IEP.

The first, Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is the ultimate goal of special education and is related to the other two important criteria: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), and parent participation, including the development of Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives. Given the importance of the IEP in helping ensure that students with disabilities receive FAPE, it is crucial for all parties involved in the development of the IEP to have an informed understanding of their rights and responsibilities. We begin by discussing the use of people-first language and the Congressional Findings regarding the education and placement of students with disabilities, as these findings represent foundational understandings necessary for a critical review of IEPs.

People-First Language and Congressional Intent

The significance of language use in reference to individuals with disabilities has been addressed by many in the field (e.g., Snow, 2012), and numerous professional organizations, including TASH and the American Psychological Association (APA), require use of people-first language in their publications. This linguistic practice helps place focus on the individual while avoiding negative stereotypical generalizations associated with disability labels. We acknowledge that disagreements exist regarding the use of people-first language, for example, some individuals prefer being called a deaf person rather than a person with a hearing impairment. However, in this paper we operate under the assumption that language does influence the ways in which individuals with disabilities are viewed by the public and ultimately served in schools. Hunt (1966), a disability rights activist, discussed the relationship between language, stigma, and treatment of individuals with disabilities across many facets of society, and that using a disability label to identify a person may result in a higher level of social segregation. In essence, the use of people-first language should be the default and changed only when requested by the individual with a disability.

As will be described below, more than 40 years since the initial passage of special education law, one still encounters situations wherein students with significant disabilities are assumed to require placement in a segregated setting based solely on disability label, and under faulty assumption that restrictive placements result in more specialized interventions (Taylor, 2004). For instance, in some districts the presumed educational placement for a student with an intellectual disability is a self-contained classroom based entirely on disability label rather than educational needs of the individual. Thus, it is important for IEP teams to use people-first language when referring to students with disabilities, since recognition of the individual before the disability can be a first step in shaping inclusive school-wide perceptions and fostering a student-centered focus.

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As noted in the following verbiage from the preamble to PL 108-446 (IDEA), the Congressional intent was to specifically recognize special education as a service, not a place. Congress also noted the importance of family involvement, high expectations for students with disabilities in the regular classroom, and the provision of professional training to meet these assumptions:

601(c)(1): Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.

601(c)(5): Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by:

having high expectations . . . and ensuring access to the general education in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent appropriate;

(B) . . . families to have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children;

(C) . . . special education can become a service . . . rather than a place . . .

(D) providing appropriate special education and related services, and aids and supports in the regular classroom . . . whenever appropriate; and

(E) supporting high-quality, intensive preservice preparation and professional development for all personnel who work with children with disabilities.

Despite these recognitions, data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2014) showed a relatively stagnant and segregated placement rate for students identified as having an Intellectual Disability (ID) or Multiple Disabilities (MD) during the 2010, 2011, and 2012 school years. Approximately 49% of students with ID and 47% with MD were educated in regular education less than 40% of the school day, and 6% of students with ID and 19% with MD were educated in separate schools. Clearly, improvements in regular education placement rates are needed to meet our national goal of providing services that will enable individuals with disabilities to participate in full school communities and the richness of American life. In the following

section, we discuss FAPE, and in subsequent sections LRE and parent participation, including the development of Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives.

Free Appropriate Public Education

The provision of FAPE is the ultimate goal of special education and all activities should be coordinated to ensure the student receives such. The 1982 U.S. Supreme Court first visited the issue in *Hendrick Hudson Dist. Bd. of Ed. v. Rowley*. The Court noted that Congress had not provided a complete definition of the meaning of FAPE, particularly a definition of what was meant by “appropriate.” When defining the concept, the Court recognized legal requirements which included that special education and related services must be provided at public expense and under public supervision and delivered as agreed upon in the IEP. The Court determined the law did not require school provide a “gold standard” wherein a student’s potential would be maximized. Rather, the law mandated access to individually designed educational programming (i.e., IEP) that is “reasonably calculated to enable the child to receive educational benefits.” While noting there is no guarantee a student will achieve the agreed upon goals, there is the legally enforceable expectation the school will deliver the supports and services identified in the IEP.

Exactly what constitutes “educational benefit” has remained controversial and on January 11, 2017, the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in an appeal of the 10th Circuit Court decision in *Andrew F. v Douglas County School District RE-1*. While there were several issues considered, a primary concern was with the 10th Circuit Court’s determination that merely more than a *de minimis*, or trivial, level of educational benefit was a sufficient standard when considering FAPE. The March 22, 2017, unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Andrew F. v. Douglas County School Dist. RE-1* nullified the standard applied by the Circuit Court and effectively raised the bar for determining whether a child with a disability received educational benefits. While not providing a specific test for determining receipt of education benefits, the Supreme Court did note that “this standard is markedly more demanding than the ‘merely more than *de minimis*’ test applied by the 10th circuit.” The Court also noted that “When all is said and done, a student offered an educational program providing ‘merely more than *de minimis*’ progress from year to year can hardly be said to have been offered an education at all.” Prior to the Supreme Court decision, the Circuit Courts were split on what level of achievement was meaningful, with some having much higher standards than that

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of the 10th Circuit. Now, children with disabilities throughout the nation can reasonably expect to receive educational benefits that are clearly more rigorous than simply *de minimis*. (See text box for additional information.)

Least Restrictive Environment

While provision of FAPE is the overarching goal of IDEA, it is closely aligned with the contentious issue of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The principle of LRE has been a component of special education law since inception in 1975, yet it continues to an area of controversy. There are advocates for restrictive special education placements who believe that removal from a regular education setting allows schools to better meet the needs of students with disabilities. The discussions justifying such beliefs and practices may perpetuate the notion of different LREs for different students or that a particular student's LRE may change over time (Heward, 2016; Kauffman, 1995). There are others (e.g., Taylor, 2004) who argue the continuum of alternate placements, Section 300.115 of the implementing regulations for IDEA, ranging from regular education to residential treatment presupposes restrictive environments and erroneously associates the most segregated settings with most intensive supports. As Taylor suggests, this assumption fails to consider significant supports can often be provided in a regular classroom, a regular work environment, or a regular residential setting. Similar to Taylor's stance and that of TASH, are others (e.g., Hyatt & Filler, 2011; Sailor et al., 1989) who argue that the law clearly identifies LRE as the regular education environment for all students. They emphasize the regular education environment as the starting point and note that the law does permit a more restrictive placement, but only if needed to provide FAPE. If an IEP team does decide for a placement other than the regular education setting, then the student must be placed in the least restrictive setting (along the continuum of alternative placements) necessary to provide FAPE. However, moving a student to a more restrictive setting than needed for educational benefit would be a denial of FAPE. The LRE requirement is also applicable to nonacademic activities, extra-curricular activities, and other school-sponsored events.

The Code of Federal Regulations, Section 300, provides specific guidance for implementing the law. For example, §300.114, titled Least Restrictive Environment, states the following:

- (2) Each public agency must ensure that:
 - (i) To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions

or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and

- (ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal for children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

As clearly required by (2)(ii) of the LRE provision, an IEP team must begin developing the IEP with the presumption that the student will be educated in the regular education environment, otherwise the team fails to meet the standards for considering whether removal is necessary. For example, if a team was completing an annual IEP for a student who was currently placed in a segregated setting due to behavioral needs and, as a matter of practice, began that IEP meeting under the assumption that the student would continue to be placed in the segregated setting, the team would likely be committing an error of making a predetermined placement. In this example, the placement was predetermined because the team made the placement decision at the beginning of the meeting before developing Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives and determining whether they could be met in the regular setting with the use of supplementary aids and services.

Placement in the regular education environment is often referred to as a *rebuttable presumption*, due to the premise of regular education placement, which may only be rebutted, or overruled, if needed to ensure FAPE. The justification for removal from regular education is not meant to be a simple academic exercise. However, for some students, it may be relatively simple to justify removal. For example, it would be straightforward to justify removing a student from the regular education setting if part of her IEP (thus FAPE) incorporated community-based job exploration activities not available at the school setting. However, the IEP team could still recognize the important fundamental assumptions of LRE by ensuring the student was placed in activities with typically developing peers or adults, rather than at a sheltered workshop or in an enclave in which groups of students with disabilities worked together in teams, which for all practical purposes mirrored segregated placements. The importance of parent participation and the development of Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives in the IEP process are discussed in the following sections.

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Parent Participation

Consistent with key principles of IDEA and the preamble to the law, is the importance of parental participation in the IEP. Schools must invite parents to IEP meetings and inform them of the participants (e.g., physical therapist) the school intends to include (§300.332(b)). Parents, however, are not required to inform schools of whom they may bring (e.g., family advocate). While schools are not required to conduct IEP meetings outside of regular school hours, they are encouraged to arrange for a variety of participation methods if a parent is unable to attend at the school (e.g., phone conference)

When preparing for an IEP meeting, it is advisable for parents to consider what outcomes they want for their children. Although specific curricular understandings might be beyond their expertise, parents may have identified and prioritized skills (e.g., communication). Additionally, key skills or skill areas can be identified through a person-centered planning process, such as MAPS (Vandercook, York, & Forest, M., 1989) prior to the IEP. In all likelihood, many of the target skills could be addressed in a range of environments, which would help the team recognize an inclusive placement as a viable option.

Section 300.321(a)(2) states “no less than one regular education teacher of the child (if the child is, or may be participating in the regular education environment)” must be a member of the IEP team. However, the regulations do contain procedures by which a required member of the IEP team may be excused if both the parent and the school agreed (§300.321(e)). Nonetheless, a school should avoid excusal. Given the LRE provisions specify the regular education setting as the presumed placement, IEP teams should exercise caution if not inviting a regular education teacher to the meeting. Failure to do so, because the school team decided that the student would not be participating in the regular education environment prior to development of the IEP, would indicate that the school engaged in actions resulting in a predetermined placement. This is a procedural error of such significance that it could result in determination of a failure to provide FAPE. Similarly, disallowing parents to contribute in the development of the IEP, including any placement decision, is a procedural error of comparable gravity.

Prior to the 2004 reauthorization, schools were prohibited from bringing draft IEPs to an IEP meeting. That prohibition was rescinded, but the practice is discouraged in the accompanying regulations (71 Fed. Reg. 46678, 2006). If a school does

complete a draft IEP, it must be clearly marked as a draft, and the school team should be cognizant that bringing a draft IEP to a meeting may stifle the conversation with the parents and effectively minimize parental participation. Further, if the school team brings a completed IEP form with placement already identified, it runs the risk of being accused of making a predetermined placement.

If the purpose for bringing a draft IEP is to facilitate a more efficient meeting, then an IEP team may be better served introducing suggested IEP goals and objectives written on separate paper. The prepared goals/objectives could be discussed and finalized at the actual meeting. Alternatively, the suggestions could also be shared with parents prior to the IEP meeting, thereby allowing time to review items and participate in meaningful goal and objective development. Following these guidelines increases the likelihood for the IEP to provide FAPE and promote inclusion of family priorities.

Goals/Objectives and Other Useful Information

A critical component for facilitating meaningful and legally compliant IEPs is development of Present Levels and associated Annual Goals/Short-Term Objectives. Present Levels statements should be written in parent-friendly language and provide a clear description of performance in area(s) in which the student will likely receive specially designed instruction. For example, a statement such as “When greeted by peers, Juan responds verbally within 3 seconds on 3 of 5 opportunities” is more helpful than a statement focused on norm-referenced test (NRT) scores, such as “Juan scored at the 2nd percentile in communication skills.” While descriptions from NRTs may be helpful for determining eligibility, they are less helpful when developing learning targets than actual behavior based data. NRT scores simply don't provide information of sufficient specificity needed to develop meaningful Annual Goals or Short-Term Objectives. While it is permissible for a school to develop Present Level statements prior to the IEP meeting, the final statements should include parental input as appropriate.

Once Present Levels are specified, the team can develop Annual Goals and associated Short-Term Objectives. While the Present Levels function as baseline description of a student's current skills, the Annual Goals state how well the team expects that student to perform in one calendar year in the areas in which the student

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will receive specially designed instruction, and the Short-Term Objectives are the intermediate steps associated with each Annual Goal that help determine progress toward attainment of the Annual Goal. The IEP need not identify all skills a student will learn in a year, but it should identify the key skills to be targeted. If the student achieves the goals before yearend, the IEP team can celebrate those successes and develop additional goals for the remainder of the year.

In order for the IEP to be legally compliant, Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives must be written in measurable terms. If unmeasurable, one could argue that the student is not receiving FAPE as there would be no way to accurately evaluate progress, and opinion is no substitute for data. The following is an example of one measurable Annual Goal in mathematics and associated Short-Term Objectives a student might work toward in relation to addition and subtraction:

- ◆ **Annual Goal:** Given a worksheet with 100 mixed, single digit addition and subtraction problems, Alex will write the correct answer to 90 problems within 2 minutes.
- ◆ **Short-Term Objective 2:** Given a worksheet with 100 single digit subtraction problems, Alex will write the correct answer to 90 problems within 2 minutes on two consecutive opportunities.
- ◆ **Short-Term Objective 1:** Given a worksheet with 100 single digit addition problems, Alex will write the correct answer to 90 problems within 2 minutes on two consecutive opportunities.

This Annual Goal represents a specific skill (single digit addition and subtraction) Alex will exhibit within one year and it is based upon his performance as described in the Present Levels. Note that Annual Goals are not lesson plans nor are they inclusive of all math skills Alex will likely develop during the year. Rather, they identify specific, measurable descriptions of priority skills that the team expects Alex to acquire. In this example, the targeted Short-Term Objectives progress from simple (addition) to more complex (subtraction) culminating in an Annual Goal which requires an even higher level of skill (differentiating addition from subtraction). In Alex's case, it is highly probable that he has additional Annual Goals in mathematics and other academic areas as well as other skill areas, including self-help, communication, etc. if needed.

Following identification and development of Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives, the team must determine which

supplementary aids and services can support the student in meeting these tasks within regular education environments. It is relatively easy to envision supporting a student who has average cognitive skills and a significant visual impairment and can read braille. The team would likely have no problem recognizing that the texts and other material should be provided in braille, thereby allowing the student to access the general education curriculum. However, when students have significant intellectual disabilities, it is often more difficult for teams to determine how to provide the supplementary aids and services in the regular education environment.

Consider a 5th grade student with a significant intellectual delay who is working on toileting skills. Many teams may determine that toileting isn't an appropriate skill to teach in a regular 5th grade classroom, so they recommend the student be placed in a self-contained classroom that happens to have a bathroom attached. This would likely be a result of an unjustifiable "we don't do that here" excuse. In essence, the team would be requiring the student develop independent toileting skills and earn his way into the regular classroom. If the team truly considered supplementary aids and services, they could implement a traditional, data-based toileting program, and schedule a time for another adult to come to the room and assist the student with toileting. Toilet training does not have to be completed in a bathroom attached to a special education classroom nor does it need to be done by the regular classroom teacher.

Let's consider one more example in which a 7th grade student with a significant intellectual delay has a communication goal of looking toward a peer within 5 seconds of the peer saying his name. Clearly this is a skill that most 7th grade students acquired years earlier and one could imagine a classroom teacher stating that there is no opportunity to work on that skill during 7th grade algebra class, thus the student should be taught those skills in the self-contained special education class. Rather than devising reasons for removing the student, the team should ask, "What supplementary aids and services can be provided in the algebra class that will allow the student to work on his communication skills with his typically developing peers?" There are many strategies that the teachers could implement, but the point is that the student could work on communication skills in a math class. Of course, he could be working on other IEP skills, too. It might require the special education teacher and possibly the speech therapist to visit the classroom, review the activities, and identify

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which other skills could be addressed in a math class (see Hyatt & Filler, 2016 for a description on using an activity matrix for such a situation). He could potentially be working on several different skillsets, such as communication, mathematics, and motor skills.

All too often students with significant disabilities are assigned a 1:1 paraprofessional rather than building upon the naturally occurring supports available in the environment. If a paraprofessional is assigned, then it is important that the para is in a supporting role rather than be the individual totally responsible for instructional design and content delivery (see Giangreco, Edleman, Luisellin, & MacFarland, 1997 for a discussion of unintended consequences when working with paraprofessionals. Their observations remain relevant some 20 years after initial publication).

In essence, the team must presume that the student will be educated in the regular education classroom with the use of supplementary aids and services and can only be removed if those needs cannot be met. The IEP team may also identify specific supports, including training, provided to the regular education teachers to enable them to meet the student's needs. A student with a disability is first and foremost a regular education student, and it is inappropriate to require that a student "earn" or "learn" her way into the regular classroom.

Conclusion

While periodically overlooked as a strategy for inclusive programming, a strategic IEP is an effective tool for ensuring access to regular education environments. It is imperative that participants have a sound understanding of the IEP process, for parents to have an opportunity to meaningfully participate, and for the IEP to be developed such that it provides a reasonable expectation of educational benefit. Moreover, it is critical for the team to begin with the assumption that the student will be educated within regular education. Should a student require a community-based setting, such as a jobsite, to meet the goals, then the school might meet the LRE intent by ensuring that the student is working with typically developing adults. Applying these foundational concepts of special education law during the IEP process helps to facilitate inclusive programming for students with disabilities.

About the Authors

Keith Hyatt, EdD works at Western Washington University in the Department of Special Education and Education Leadership. His professional interests include disability law, inclusion, the IEP, and evidence-based vs. pseudoscientific practice. He writes, "Disability is natural part of the human condition and an aspect of diversity that is frequently overlooked. High quality instruction in inclusive settings can significantly and positively impact the lives of individuals with disabilities and foster social justice. The law and IEP are two avenues that can support inclusive practices."



Aaron Perzigan, PhD's research examines the efficacy of alternative school contexts (e.g., behavior reassignment programs) and the ways in which social-emotional learning predicts academic performance for students with high-incidence disabilities.



His PhD dissertation (2015) examined ratings of school climate across various school types and the relationship between climate ratings and school achievement (i.e., attendance, behavior referral, and credits earned) in different school categories (i.e., academic remediation, behavior reassignment, school choice innovative, and traditional).

He is actively seeking collaborators in research within special education teacher preparation, social-emotional learning, and alternative schools as well as other opportunities related to strengthening the learning climates -and thereby educational trajectories – for all students.

Professionally, he is both interested and invested in civic education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and meaningful participation of individuals with disabilities in all facets of society. He writes, "I proudly serve on the boards of Communities In Schools of Whatcom County and the Developmental Disabilities Advisory Council of Whatcom County."

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Andrew F. and an End to the “more than ‘de minimus’ Standard”

Keith J. Hyatt, EdD and Aaron B. Perzigian, PhD, Western Washington University

In a 2017 decision celebrated by many disability rights groups (e.g., Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPPA)), the U. S. Supreme Court in *Andrew F. v. Douglas County School Dist. RE-1* issued a unanimous decision clarifying “meaningful educational benefit.” The Justices forcefully affirmed the right of children with disabilities to be afforded ambitious and challenging educational opportunities. In doing so, the Justices reversed a decision by the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals which held that an appropriate level of educational benefit for children with disabilities was simply more than “de minimus” or trivial learning.

Briefly, the facts of the case taken from the Opinion of the Court (580 U. S. ____ (2017)) are as follows. Andrew (Drew) was a student with autism who attended public school in Colorado. Among other things, his parents argued that the district failed to provide Drew with a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) because his progress in academic and functional skills had stalled. They contended that the IEP goals and objectives were substantively the same from year to year, which was indicative of failure to provide FAPE. Drew’s parents placed him in a private school wherein he was provided with a behavior intervention plan resulting in dramatically improved behavior and academic progress that had not been realized in the public school. They asserted that the district failed to deliver FAPE by not providing Drew with an IEP that was “reasonably calculated to enable [him] to receive educational benefits.” His parents filed a complaint with the state. The district prevailed at the administrative appeals, District Court and Court of Appeals levels; however, Drew’s parents persisted and succeeded at the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the decision, the Supreme Court noted that it had first addressed FAPE and the requirement that the IEP must be “reasonably calculated to enable the child to receive educational benefits” in 1982 (*Hendrick Hudson Dist. Bd. of Ed. V. Rowley*). However, the question of FAPE and the provision of educational benefits was significantly different between *Rowley* and *Andrew*. Since Amy *Rowley* was educated in the regular education setting, advancing through grade levels, and actually achieving at a rate higher than her average classmate, the Court reasoned she was receiving meaningful educational benefit. In the *Andrew* decision, the Court noted that moving through grade levels was not appropriate for all students and stated the following:

If that is not a reasonable prospect for a child, his IEP need not aim for grade level advancement. But his educational program must be appropriately ambitious in light of his circumstances, just as advancement from grade to grade is appropriately ambitious for most children in the regular classroom. The goals may differ, but every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives.

...It cannot be the case that the Act typically aims for grade-level advancement for children with disabilities who can be educated in the regular classroom, but is satisfied with barely more than de minimis progress for those who cannot.

When all is said and done, a student offered an educational program providing “merely more than de minimis” progress from year to year can hardly be said to have been offered an education at all. (p. 14).

The decision has significant implications for IEP teams and schools. It clearly raises the bar on the educational expectations for students with disabilities, especially those students who experience the most significant learning and behavioral challenges. While the Supreme Court admittedly did not try to develop a specific test that would determine whether a child was receiving a meaningful educational benefit, it did clarify that trivial learning goals are unacceptable outcomes for student with disabilities. The Court reaffirmed the individualized attention that must be afforded to students and recognized the important role parents play in developing the IEP. The decision and Amici Curiae (friend of the court) briefs submitted on behalf of both Endrew and the district can be accessed at the SCOTUSblog.

Following is a non-exhaustive list of simple guidelines for IEP teams to consider that would facilitate provision of appropriately ambitious learning outcomes “reasonably calculated to enable the child to receive educational benefits” (Rowley):

1. Ensure meaningful parent participation;
2. Develop ambitious IEP goals and objectives that could be met before the annual review;
3. Regularly collect data to determine if the student is making adequate progress and adjust instructional methodology if necessary;
4. Reference the general education curriculum whenever possible, even if at a different grade level;
5. Identify skills that are chronologically age appropriate and socially validated;
6. Maintain high learning expectations for all students;
7. Conduct Functional Behavioral Assessments and develop Positive Behavior Support Plans as necessary; and
8. Consider the range of special education and related services (don’t overlook assistive technology) necessary to meet goals and objectives.

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All Together Now: Essential Ideas for Co-Teaching and Inclusion

By Julie Causton, PhD and Kate MacLeod, M.S.Ed, Syracuse University

Inclusive education and co-teaching are necessary complements to one another. Co-teaching often exists when schools adopt inclusive practices. In co-taught classrooms, general and special education teachers work together in highly coordinated ways to give all students seamless access to general education curriculum, and importantly, to give academic access and social support to students with disabilities through the IEP. We feel so strongly about co-teaching and the connection to inclusion that one of us (Julie) just co-wrote an entire book on the subject entitled *30 Days to the Co-Taught Classroom: How to Create an Amazing, Nearly Miraculous & Frankly Earth Shattering Partnership in One Month or Less* with her co-author Paula Kluth (<http://www.cotaughtclassroom.com>). While the aim of this article is to share 5 essential elements of co-teaching for those seeking to implement more inclusive practices and understand how these practices connect seamlessly to the Individualized Education Program (IEP), if you are looking for more detailed information, we recommend reading the book. But here we'll provide a range of strategies powerful co-teaching teams use to support diverse student groups: create a shared vision about co-teaching and inclusive education, operate as equals, develop shared habits of mind, expand structures, and plan to plan.

Create a Shared Vision

While there are exceptions to the rule, most co-teaching relationships start because of a school or district's desire to better support diverse learners by growing their inclusive schooling model. We believe combining co-teaching models and practices with inclusive schooling is necessary to allow all students to reach their full academic and social potential. In order to make this happen, we suggest co-teachers create a shared vision for co-teaching and inclusion.

What Is Co-Teaching?

We define co-teaching as a) two licensed professionals (i.e., general educator and special educator) working together to provide instruction to diverse learners with and without disabilities in the general education classroom, while b) ensuring

students with disabilities are entitled to student specific supports as determined through and written in their IEP (i.e., specially designed instruction, supplementary aids and services) (Dieker, 2013; Friend & Cook, 1995; Murawski, 2005). Marilyn Friend (2007), co-teaching guru, further explains that co-teaching often occurs in a shared classroom and that each teacher's participation may vary according to their skills and the needs of the students. But because co-teaching can vary, it is important for you and your co-teacher to develop your own shared understanding. Set aside some time to create a vision that will clearly communicate your shared intentions.

What is inclusion?

Inclusive education is commonly understood as a model of service delivery where students with and without disabilities are educated in age-appropriate, general education classes in their neighborhood schools. And while this definition is a good start, we feel inclusive schooling is much more than a way to support students with identified needs.

Inclusion, to us,

is not only about disability. It is about every learner in the classroom being valued and seen as an important member of the school including students from all racial and ethnic groups, students new to the school, English language learners and students with diverse family constellations. Inclusion, therefore, means making sure that every learner feels socially connected and welcome in the classroom and in the school. It means honoring the social needs of students as well as their academic needs and treating all members of the school community with dignity and respect (Kluth & Causton, 2015, p. 4)

Inclusion, therefore, is a strategy for transforming schools, for its underlying philosophy asks us to constantly explore the structures, practices, and norms to identify and eliminate those barriers and provide authentic learning for all. We suggest you create a shared vision about what inclusion can be for you and your co-teacher, your students, and your classroom. Some questions that can help guide this visioning include:

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- ◆ What is the purpose of teaching?
- ◆ What does our ideal learning community look and feel like?
- ◆ What do we want our students to remember about our co-taught classroom?
- ◆ When creating this shared vision of inclusive co-teaching, we also suggest that you:
- ◆ Be audacious, grand and daring;
- ◆ Be specific; and
- ◆ Be open to interrogating old practices and reimagining “what can be.” (Kluth & Causton, 2015, p. 15)

What about the IEP?

Once you’ve got a shared vision, we suggest you begin to examine how co-teaching and inclusion is intimately linked to your students’ Individualized Education Programs (IEP). Co-teaching provides your students with support from two teachers who will: a) foster an inclusive environment where all students feel they belong, b) work together to provide differentiated access

to curriculum and instruction, and c) actively provide student specific supports outlined on their IEP. But in order for this to all happen effectively, both the general and special education teachers must have intimate knowledge of student strengths, skills, and supports and services.

Often when we discuss co-teaching services outlined on the IEP, we imagine the number of “minutes” a student has with the special education co-teacher. But in inclusive co-taught classrooms and schools, co-teachers are jointly responsible for helping students with disabilities meet their IEP goals within the general education settings throughout the school day. Therefore, we no longer need to remove a student from the general education settings to provide them supports and services; educators can meet student service “minutes” by utilizing a wide range of co-teaching models (e.g., direct, indirect, consultant). To help co-teaching teams understand this fluid collaborative service delivery, we suggest the use of an IEP matrix (Figure 1). This tool can help teams brainstorm ways to integrate IEP goals throughout the school day without worrying whether the special education teacher, therapist, or paraprofessional will be next to the student when the IEP goal is targeted.

Figure 1 Program Planning Matrix

Student Aidan Teachers: Kate & Julie Date 1/19/2016_____

IEP Goals (in a few words)	Class Schedule		
	READING	WRITING	MATH
Use iPad to type responses	P	P, X	S
Initiate conversation with a peer using pre-recorded phrases on iPad	P	P	P

Key: X, instruction provided; P, classroom participation plans with general adaptations required; S, specific adaptations to class activities and materials may be needed; TA, task analytic instructional plans.

Causton, J. & Tracy-Bronson, C. (2015) *The educators handbook for inclusive schools practices*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H Brookes.

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Operate as Equals

One of the biggest challenges in co-teaching is determining how to operate as equals. Gone are the days where the general educator owns the curriculum and the special educator modifies or supports it and owns the IEP or writes IEP goals in isolation. Operating as equals is therefore an artful way to blur the lines between general and special educators and shift the unintentional stigma associated with outdated models of special education.

But how do you know if co-teachers have yet to establish themselves as true partners in the eyes of students, colleagues or other stakeholders? There are many telltale signs:

- ◆ Parents only know one of the teachers;
- ◆ One teacher calls the space “my classroom” instead of “our classroom”;
- ◆ One teacher is primarily positioned at the front of the classroom and the other can be found wandering the hallways, getting coffee or Tweeting about the need to establish equity in the classroom.

Sometimes these behaviors create tension in a co-teaching relationship, but other times, co-teachers are unaware of the importance of showing a united front and reinventing classroom roles. To avoid the pitfalls above, Cook and Friend (1995) suggest teachers send parity signals in order to communicate their cooperation to others. Parity signals are “visual, verbal, and instructional signals” that convey equality (p. 11). For example, two co-teachers might take turns authoring the classroom newsletter.

Other possible parity signals include:

- ◆ putting both of your names on the board, the door, paperwork and classroom websites;
- ◆ routinely talking to your students about your shared roles as teachers;
- ◆ setting up the classroom to accommodate both teachers and to make collaboration easier (e.g., pushing your desks together);
- ◆ wearing matching t-shirts, ties or “I love co-teaching” suspenders on the first day;
- ◆ creating fun rituals perfect for two people like knock-knock jokes, call and response chants (e.g., I say “fusion,” you say

“fission”) and impromptu dance offs

- ◆ sharing the responsibility of communicating with parents; and
- ◆ attending student conferences together.

Once you have established parity in the classroom, it is time to assess role sharing. Role sharing is essential when co-teaching. General educators need not be the only ones delivering lessons, special educators need not be the only ones supporting individual students, and paraprofessionals need not focus their support guidance and attention on learners with disabilities alone. These roles should regularly be shared and rotated. This not only serves to communicate parity, but can also be used as a staff development tool. When each adult in the classroom engages in role sharing, they can learn unique skills from each other and have the opportunity to take on many new challenges. We suggest using the Co-Teaching Roles & Responsibilities Checklist (Figure 2) to jumpstart your conversation about the equitable division of tasks in your inclusive co-taught classroom.

Parity is also important to consider in relation to the IEP. Co-teachers are jointly responsible for determining student needs, writing and implementing the IEP, and assessing IEP goals. Parity should also be negotiated for the actual IEP meeting, so you can each determine how to take co-ownership of sharing information with the family before, during and after the meeting. Co-teachers should discuss how to share the responsibility of helping a student to participate in and lead his or her own meeting. Parity should also be considered when thinking about who will share informal communication with parents regarding student IEP progress.

Hone Helpful Habits of Mind

We believe that co-teaching is much more than putting two teachers in a room together; it requires constant communication, reflection and problem solving. When supporting teams who are beginning to co-teach, the most common phrase we hear is, “I don’t want to step on her/his toes.” This makes sense, as most of us were taught to plan, teach, and assess students in our own classrooms. So after creating a shared vision, combining roles and working together, we think establishing habits of mind or norms for communication and behavior is the next step. These ideas if adopted, have the power to transform your collaborative relationship and your daily work in the classroom.

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Figure 2 Co-Teaching Roles & Responsibilities Checklist

Source: Kluth, P. & Causton, J. (2016). *30 Days to the Co-taught classroom: How to Create an Amazing, Nearly Miraculous & Frankly Earth Shattering Partnership in One Month or Less.*

Read through this list of roles and responsibilities in the co-taught classroom. For each item, determine which person on your team will have (p) primary responsibility; (s) secondary responsibility; (sh) shared responsibility; and/or (i) input in the decision-making.

ROLE OR RESPONSIBILITY	GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER	SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER	OTHER (e.g., parapro., speech path.)
designing differentiated curriculum, instruction & assessment			
creating student-specific modifications & adaptations			
integrating student IEP objectives into daily instruction			
creating classroom materials for all (e.g., models, anchor charts)			
creating adapted materials for some (e.g., assignment checklists, picture schedules)			
setting up necessary assistive technology for lessons (e.g., switches, alternate keyboards)			
providing 1:1 instruction when needed			
teaching whole-class lessons			
leading small-group lessons			
monitoring student progress			
conducting assessments			
grading (e.g., homework, quizzes)			
tabulating final grades			
completing report cards			
sharing IEP data/updates with families			
communicating with families			
participating in parent-teacher conferences			
writing the IEP			
participating in IEP meetings			
consulting with related services			
providing training for paraprofessional			
providing regular feedback for paraprofessional			
organizing planning meetings			
facilitating meetings			
facilitating peer supports (e.g., educating students about supporting one another)			
managing classroom; keeping materials/space organized			

When you have finished determining roles and responsibilities, consider the following questions:

1. Does anyone feel uncomfortable with any of the roles as outlined?
2. Should any of these roles and responsibilities be changed?
3. Will anyone need support to engage in these roles and responsibilities?
4. What messages does our proposed division of responsibilities send to students, parents and our colleagues?

Adapted from: Causton, J. & Theoharis, G. (2014). *The Principal's Handbook for Leading Inclusive Schools.* Paul H. Brookes Publishing. Baltimore, MD: pp. 80-81.

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Choose Your Battles

Choosing battles is advice that applies to our collaborative relationships, as well as our interactions with students. Try to remember that winning is not the point. Certainly there will be times when you do have to “go to battle,” but try to choose these situations with care. You may need to defend a student if another teacher is sharing disparaging comments in the faculty lounge, but if your co-teaching partner forgets to download game show tunes to compliment the Family-Feud-style review activity you have co-planned, you might want to relax, count to ten and simply enjoy the game without music. Flexibility is one of the greatest skills you can cultivate.

Practice Gratitude

Extend gratitude to your co-teaching partner regularly as a way to strengthen teams, build relationships and identify aspects of your teaming that are going well and deserve attention.

As you think of people to be grateful for, remember that anyone can be the focus of your gratitude – a school secretary who made the morning coffee, a student who held the door open for you, or your co-teaching partner for remembering to bring Styrofoam balls for your 3-D models of the human eye. To turn this practice into a habit, we suggest a daily focus on gratitude, preferably, first thing in the morning. A morning gratitude practice sets the stage for a positive and productive day in your co-taught classroom.

Expand Your Structures

All co-teaching structures are not created equal. Learning and becoming familiar with various structures is therefore essential for this work. You and your co-teacher can then strategically select those that allow for the greatest student benefit, rather than the greatest teacher comfort. You should move in and out of all of these structures with ease and according to the goal or objectives of the lesson. And, be strategic when thinking about the structures in order to do the many complex tasks involved in IEP data collection and recording. For example, you might notice when you review these 6 structures that one teach one float is an excellent choice for taking data on IEP goals related to hand raising or on-task behavior, but station teaching is more appropriate when taking data on how a student is able to sequence events in a story.

In the book, Julie and her co-author, Paula Kluth, introduce and describe each of the following six structures of co-teaching. Here, we rank order them to help evidence which structures have

the greatest potential for student benefit when considering the following factors: 1) differentiation opportunities, 2) reduction of the student teacher ratio, 3) opportunities for small group individualization, and 4) demonstration of parity.

#1 Station Teaching. In this structure, teachers divide instructional content into three or more segments and present content in different areas of the classroom or school. Stations are often designed around a content piece or activity. Students rotate between stations, and when they complete one full rotation of the stations, they have finished each of the learning experiences that have been designed for them.

#2 One Teach/One Make Multisensory. The goal of this structure is to help differentiate the content as it is being delivered by providing students multiple access points. So, while one teacher is teaching in a traditional style (i.e., lecturing) the other is providing a different type of student input (i.e., dramatically acting out the scene, mapping the story on paper, adding special effects, conducting a demonstration, illustrating, leading the class in movement).

#3 Parallel Teaching. In this structure, the co-teachers divide the classroom in half in order to reduce the student to teacher ratio. In this structure, each teacher is responsible for one half of the class, thus creating a more intimate learning experience while demonstrating parity.

#4 Duet Teaching. This structure involves both adults teaching the class at the same time. Co-teachers collaboratively lead class discussions, answer student questions or facilitate lectures and activities. This allows students to see both teachers as equals that work, teach and learn as a teaching team.

#5 One Teach/ One Assist. Here, one teacher leads the lesson while the other supports the lead teacher in various ways. This often helps with logistics of lessons (i.e., while one teacher is talking, the other is handing out materials), but it is necessary to vary who leads instruction in order to assure parity between co-teachers. This has been considered a highly over-used structure (Scruggs, Mastropiere, & McDuffie, 2007). The allure of this model, however, may be that it works when little co-planning has taken place before a lesson, or, if one teacher is not yet comfortable with the content.

#6 One Teach/One Float. This structure is perhaps most useful when the content is

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important for students to imitate or replicate something. For example, when creating landform structures with play-dough, one teacher can be demonstrating and teaching in the front of the room, while the other is floating between students and supporting or critiquing individual sculptures.

Plan to Plan

It's true, effective lesson planning is at the heart of all good teaching. But it becomes even more critical when you have two teachers working together who are responsible for planning both content and adaptations for a diverse group of learners. When co-teachers don't plan together, they lose out on those precious collaborative ideas that help to better serve their students. Planning separately also means that co-teachers need to rely on the less effective co-teaching models, like one teach/one assist and one teach/one float. In the book, many strategies and tools are described to help you and your co-teacher plan more collaboratively and effectively. But in this article we have decided to focus on the two below.

Find Time

Often co-teachers have limited face-to-face planning or IEP writing time, or need to plan with multiple co-teachers, so it is important to begin by assessing your needs. What do you need to do face-to-face? And what can you handle using online planning tools and other online communication and sharing methods such as Skype, Google Drive and Dropbox? Once you have these needs sorted, you may realize that you need more face-to-face time than your schedules currently allow. We suggest showing up before or after school; planning when students are completing independent or technology based work (i.e. independent reading, online programs, watching videos, or engaging in peer tutoring); or bringing in volunteers or staff (i.e. parents, community members, social worker, therapists, etc.) to lead instruction, read aloud, or give a presentation. We also encourage you to plan creative ways to shuffle staff and get more planning time by creating cross-curricular and multi-age level projects.

Build a Toolbox

To have great meetings, whether it's during a 15-minute presentation from a city councilwoman or a 40-minute block before school, co-teachers must use various tools to stay focused and productive. In the book, many ideas are highlighted, but here we highlight a few: guidelines, agenda, roles, and notes. Meeting guidelines should be simple, but thoughtfully proposed and used (i.e., we always begin/end on time, we listen to understand). The agenda is absolutely critical to keep you focused. Roles are important, because you'll need a facilitator, a timekeeper, and you'll need someone to take notes. And, no matter how big or small your meeting (just you and your co-teacher, or, the entire seventh grade team), be sure to regularly rotate roles so that every member has the opportunity to polish various collaborative skills. Finally, the meeting notes will help you keep track of what you accomplished and next steps. We've included a note taking format for team meetings (Figure 3) with features that are fairly self-explanatory, such as a spot for each agenda item, a column to indicate how much time you will need for each topic and a section to list actions needed before the next meeting. You may also notice the soundtrack suggestion, and the quote-of-the-week and celebration items... who said meetings couldn't be fun?

Don't Forget the IEP

Last but certainly not least, we suggest co-teachers use an abbreviated one-page IEP document that lists goals and objectives for each student when planning. Having these documents available while planning helps co-teachers consider how to integrate individual IEP goals and objectives into each general education lesson plan. For example, while planning a lesson on *The Color Purple*, you see a student's IEP goal of increasing reciprocal two-way interactions with her peers. Keeping this in mind, the co-teachers plan to use a whole-class partnered reading strategy, *Say Something*, where students read a passage paragraph by paragraph to each other, and then stop to ask a question, or "say something" to each other about what they've just read. One teacher plans to lead the instruction, while the other observes the student to take data, and support her if necessary, on reciprocal two-way interactions.

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Figure 3 Team Meeting Notes

Source: Kluth, P. & Causton, J. (2016). *30 Days to the Co-taught classroom: How to Create an Amazing, Nearly Miraculous & Frankly Earth Shattering Partnership in One Month or Less.*

30 DAYS TO THE CO-TAUGHT CLASSROOM

FIGURE 8.1

Team Meeting Notes

 Soundtrack: _____
  We are celebrating: _____

 Movie quote that captures the spirit of our work this week: _____

TYPE OF AGENDA ITEM FYI: Information JD: Just Discussion ND: Needs Decision JWB: Just Want To Brag NTGOM/CBIE: Need To Get Off My Chest Before I Explode	AGENDA ITEMS	ACTION/S REQUIRED (e.g., make materials, research topic, create adaptations, look for a volunteer)	PERSON/S RESPONSIBLE (e.g., pod 2 team, reed & jay)	TIMELINE (e.g., by next week)	TIME REQUIRED (e.g. estimated time needed for topic)		
					<input type="checkbox"/> 5 min	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 min	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
					<input type="checkbox"/> 5 min	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 min	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
					<input type="checkbox"/> 5 min	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 min	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
					<input type="checkbox"/> 5 min	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 min	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
					<input type="checkbox"/> 5 min	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 min	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
					<input type="checkbox"/> 5 min	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 min	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

Adapted from: Ford, A. (1995). Wisconsin School Inclusion Project: A Team Planning Packet for Inclusive Education.

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Conclusion

After reading this, we encourage you and your co-teacher to: 1) write down your shared vision; 2) discuss new ways to operate as equals; 3) hone specific habits of mind; 4) begin experimenting with different co-teaching structures; and 5) dedicate time to thoughtful planning using a consistent tool. Once you do, we think you'll be well on your way to creating a successful co-teaching partnership. But as you develop great new skills and competencies, questions will continue to arise. And when they do, we encourage you to reframe the question so that it centers on your students. For example, instead of, "Are we using the right co-teaching structure for this lesson?" ask, "Does this co-teaching structure provide all our students with the supports and challenge they need?" And rather than stress over the question "Why won't she let me lead the lesson introduction?" focus on the question, "Will having this difficult conversation about parity help us to set higher learning standards for students?"

Co-teaching allows us to take new professional risks and have a partner by our side to share the ups and downs of teaching. It gives us someone to share responsibilities with and brainstorm more creative and fun ways to deliver engaging and memorable lessons. And co-teaching helps us to create more cohesive and effective teams when it comes to writing and implementing IEPs. Co-teaching ultimately requires that we rely on each other in order to create classrooms in which all of our students feel an authentic sense of belonging, have appropriate access to general education curriculum, and are meaningfully included.

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She is an educational consultant and works with administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals and families across the country to help them promote and improve inclusive practices. Her dynamic presentations focus on engaging ways to educate all students within the context of general education.

Julie is the author of many [books](#) about inclusive education and she has published [articles](#) in over thirty educational research and practitioner journals.

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She is an educational consultant who works with schools and families to create more inclusive practices for all. Her research is focused on best practices for the inclusion for students with complex support needs and understanding the culture of inclusive schools.



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TASH offers membership at a variety of levels. Please review the details below and choose the membership level that is appropriate for you. Individual and organizational memberships are available. Membership is valid for a 12 month term. A complete summary of member benefits can be found at www.tash.org/join.

	Regular	Reduced			Organization \$385
	Professional \$165	Associate \$85	Self-Advocate, Family & Supporter \$35	Student \$45	
Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, the official TASH research journal (print copy)	X				1 COPY
Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, (online access to current and archived issues)	X	X		X	X
Connections, the quarterly magazine written by and for TASH members	X	X	X	X	X
Connections Library (includes access to 10 years of Connections archives)	X	X			X
TASH webinar archive	X				X
Reduced registration rates for TASH conferences and events	X	X	X	X	5 STAFF
Discounts for TASH Training webinars, publications & other offerings	X	X	X	X	5 STAFF
Access to TASH's professional network, forums & blogs	X	X	X	X	X
Affiliation with a TASH Chapter (includes policy and expertise, Capitol Hill Days, Chapter communications & activities)	X	X	X	X	X
Advocacy Alerts & Updates	X	X	X	X	X
	<input type="checkbox"/> Select	<input type="checkbox"/> Select	<input type="checkbox"/> Select	<input type="checkbox"/> Select	<input type="checkbox"/> Select

Demographic Information

This information is collected for TASH's use only so that we can better serve our members' needs.

What is your race or ethnicity? (Optional; select all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Asian
- Black or African American
- White/Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Other _____

Which of the following best describes you? Select all that apply. (not applicable for organizational members)

- General Educator
- Special Educator
- Education Administrator
- Transition Educator
- University Faculty
- University Researcher
- Person with a disability
- Parent of a person with a disability
- Sibling of a person with a disability
- Other family member of a person with a disability
- Early Intervention Service Provider
- School-Aged Related Service Provider
- Adult Service Provider
- Government – Federal
- Government – State
- Government – Local
- Attorney
- Public Policy Advocate
- Other Advocate
- Other _____

Please indicate your areas of interest. Select all that apply.

- Early Childhood
- K-12 Education
- Transition
- Post-Secondary Education
- Employment
- Community Living
- Aging Issues
- Advocacy
- Public Policy
- International Issues
- Assistive Technology
- Communication
- Diversity & Cultural Competency
- Human Rights
- Other _____

Additional Information

Your Date of Birth (Optional): ____/____/____

If you are a family member of a person with a disability, fill out the date of birth of your family member: ____/____/____

If you are a student, please fill out the following fields:

University Name: _____ Expected Completion Date: _____

Major/Department Name: _____

If you are a university educator, what is your field of study? _____

Payment Information

Credit Card (select card type)

- American Express Visa
- MasterCard Discover

Check (make payable to TASH)

Purchase Order

P.O. #: _____

(send copy with membership form)

Card #: _____ Expiration: _____

Name on Card: _____ CVV: _____

Authorized Signature: _____

Would you like to make a tax-deductible donation to TASH?

- \$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$ _____

Total Payment (add membership total and donation, if applicable) \$: _____

Please submit this membership form via mail, fax or e-mail. With questions, contact (202) 540-9020.

2013 H Street, NW, Suite 715

Washington, DC 20006

Fax (202) 540-9019

E-mail info@tash.org



www.tash.org to learn more about TASH

www.tash.org/join for an overview of member benefits

TASH Amplified

A podcast series



NEW!

Welcome to **TASH Amplified**, TASH's new podcast series. This series seeks to transform research and experience concerning inclusion and equity for people with disabilities into solutions people can use in their everyday lives.

Season One Episodes

A Brief History of PBIS

Special Education Teachers and the General Education Curriculum

Teaching Math to Students with Disabilities: What We've Learned in 10 Years

What Matters to Family Members when a Relative Transitions to Community Living

Reflections on 40 Years of Agency Community Supports

Building Communities to Support People with Disabilities

Faith and Flourishing: Equipping Your Church to Reach Out to People with Disabilities

Presentations on Recreation and Leisure for People with Disabilities at the TASH Annual Conference

Faith and Flourishing: Welcoming Children with Disabilities and their Families

Faith and Flourishing: Hidden in Plain Sight

Barb Trader Reflects on a Lifetime of Accomplishment in Disability Rights

www.tash.org/amplified



TASH is an international leader in disability advocacy. Founded in 1975, TASH advocates for human rights and inclusion for people with significant disabilities and support needs – those most vulnerable to segregation, abuse, neglect and institutionalization. TASH works to advance inclusive communities through advocacy, research, professional development, policy, and information and resources for parents, families and self-advocates. The inclusive practices TASH validates through research have been shown to improve outcomes for all people.

Policy Statement

It is TASH's mission to eliminate physical and social obstacles that prevent equity, diversity and quality of life for children and adults with disabilities. Items in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect attitudes held by individual members of the Association as a whole. TASH reserves the right to exercise editorial judgment in selection of materials. All contributors and advertisers are asked to abide by the TASH policy on the use of people-first language that emphasizes the humanity of people with disabilities. Terms such as "the mentally retarded," "autistic children," and "disabled individuals" refer to characteristics of individuals, not to individuals themselves. Terms such as "people with mental retardation," "children with autism," and "individuals who have disabilities" should be used. The appearance of an advertisement for a product or service does not imply TASH endorsement. For a copy of TASH's publishing and advertising policy, please visit www.tash.org.

TASH Mission & Vision

As a leader in disability advocacy for more than 35 years, the mission of TASH is to promote the full inclusion and participation of children and adults with significant disabilities in every aspect of their community, and to eliminate the social injustices that diminish human rights. These things are accomplished through collaboration among self-advocates, families, professionals, policy-makers, advocates and many others who seek to promote equity, opportunity and inclusion. Together, this mission is realized through:

- ♦ Advocacy for equity, opportunities, social justice and human rights
- ♦ Education of the public, government officials, community leaders and service providers
- ♦ Research that translates excellence to practice
- ♦ Individualized, quality supports in place of congregate and

segregated settings and services

- ♦ Legislation, litigation and public policy consistent with the mission and vision of TASH

The focus of TASH is supporting those people with significant disabilities and support needs who are most at risk for being excluded from society; perceived by traditional service systems as most challenging; most likely to have their rights abridged; most likely to be at risk for living, working, playing and learning in segregated environments; least likely to have the tools and opportunities necessary to advocate on their behalf; and are most likely to need ongoing, individualized supports to participate in inclusive communities and enjoy a quality of life similar to that available to all people.

TASH has a vision of a world in which people with disabilities are included and fully participating members of their communities, with no obstacles preventing equity, diversity and quality of life. TASH envisions communities in which no one is segregated and everyone belongs. This vision will be realized when:

- ♦ All individuals have a home, recreation, learning and employment opportunities
- ♦ All children and youth are fully included in their neighborhood schools
- ♦ There are no institutions
- ♦ Higher education is accessible for all
- ♦ Policy makers and administrators understand the struggles of people with disabilities and plan – through laws, policies and regulations – for their active participation in all aspects of life
- ♦ All individuals have a way to communicate and their communities are flexible in communicating in alternate ways that support full participation
- ♦ Injustices and inequities in private and public sectors are eradicated
- ♦ Practices for teaching, supporting and providing services to people with disabilities are based on current, evidence-based strategies that promote high quality and full participation in all aspects of life
- ♦ All individuals with disabilities enjoy individualized supports and a quality of life similar to that available to all people
- ♦ All individuals with disabilities have the tools and opportunities to advocate on their behalf