

Transition

Best Practice Update

Student Led IEP's

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People with disabilities have told us they wish they had been more involved in the planning and decision making that occurs throughout their education to prepare them for adulthood. As young adults they are faced with many choices; work, living arrangements, community access, and social relationships. Unfortunately, due to either lack of involvement or understanding, they are relatively inexperienced, or have had difficult experiences resulting in poor choices. Frequently, this is related to their lack of understanding about their own disability and its impact on their lives.

Many educators have taken a proactive approach to prepare young people with disabilities to be more self-determined. Student participation in IEPs is a critical part of increasing students' self-determination. Data from the ND Transition Follow-up Study supported by the ND Department of Public Instruction and conducted by the ND Center for Persons with Disabilities, shows that over 75% of ND Students with disabilities attend their IEP meetings and most actively participate in the meeting. Unfortunately, we do not know what "active participation" really means. Conversations with teachers suggest that few students actually are leaders in their IEP meetings.

What is a Student-Led IEP?

A student-led IEP is an IEP meeting in which the student takes a leadership, or at least substantial, role in the development of the meeting or the IEP document. Educators understand that the local education agency (LEA) is ultimately responsible for the development of an IEP. However, most educators are trained to use a multi-disciplinary or interdisciplinary team process that includes input from many people. Similarly, IDEA '97 promotes greater involvement from family members in IEPs and in the assessment process. Getting students more involved in IEP development is an extension of both the team process and the intent of IDEA.

Getting Students Ready for the IEP

Most students know bits and pieces about their IEPs, but few have a good understanding of the document or the process. A good first step is to provide some direct instruction about the IEP process. This would include presenting the general purpose of IEPs, the major parts of the IEP document, and the general procedures of the IEP meeting. Educators will need to make appropriate instructional modifications when presenting this information dependent upon the students' disabilities. For example, some teachers might use overheads or handouts for students with mild disabilities, while role-plays may work for students with cognitive disabilities.

Steps Toward a Student Led IEP

McGahee, Tucker, and Zamarippa (2001) describe methods used to develop student led IEPs in Arlington, VA. They first discuss student self-advocacy. Three key parts here are to 1) teach students to accept their disabilities, 2) help students understand and plan their futures, and 3) request help in carrying out their future plans.

These authors then discuss six key steps to encourage student led IEPs. These are present in Table 1. First, students and teachers review the previous years' IEP. The major parts of the IEP (i.e., present level of performance, goals

1.	Review last year's IEP and write goals.
2.	Send invitations.
3.	Review the laws.
4.	State strengths, weaknesses, needs and protests.
5.	Request needed accommodations.
6.	Write a transition plan.

and objectives, service characteristics, modifications and accommodations, and the transition plan) should be covered. If the student was not a part of last years' IEP meeting, the teacher should convey the intent of the team in each section.

The student and teacher (or even the parents) should then work on two or three major goals for next year. These should be written and the student should become comfortable in explaining them.

Next, students should send invitations to the IEP meetings. This will be done in concert with the teacher, and with careful planning and appropriate letters, can meet the LEA's legal requirement of prior notice.

Step three is a review of the laws. In this case, the student and teacher should briefly review IDEA as it pertains to the IEP. Any good special education introductory text will provide a nice outline for this.

Understanding one's disability and the services necessary for success is crucial to school achievement and adult success. Step four requires the student to self analyze his/her abilities, needs and services required for success. Previous present levels of performance can be used and discussed with the student. Then a discussion of the types of services and techniques that have worked and not worked (from the student's view point) should be reviewed.

Step five will require the student to ask for accommodations and modifications. Based on notes developed in step four, the student can be coached to request specific support services at the appropriate time in the IEP meeting.

Finally, the student can help write the transition plan. Based on his/her future goals and knowledge of needed supports, the student can talk about needed transition services, necessary high school courses, and possible timelines for meeting the goals.

Student Support for Writing Goals

Van Dycke and Peterson (2003) outline eight steps used to help students develop their own IEP goals. See Table 2 for a list of these eight steps. First, the teacher and student should review the student's current work. This self-evaluation will give the student a good barometer of past progress and future expectations.

1.	Evaluate current progress.
2.	Choose goal topic or action.
3.	Determine condition for performance.
4.	Set criteria for acceptable performance.
5.	Write the goal.
6.	Implement the goal.
7.	Evaluate performance.
8.	Make necessary adjustments.

Next, the student will choose a goal topic. Based on student needs (from the present level of performance) the teacher and student outline a measurable action. Often, it is important to match student goals to state or local standards.

Step three requires a description of the condition(s) necessary for the performance of the goal. This might be an accommodation or set of materials necessary to perform the action of the goal.

Setting criteria is the next step. Students must be able to describe the level of accuracy or duration of the action that would indicate success.

Step five is the writing of the goal. A fill-in-the blank formula can help the student. The formula might be: "Given (condition), (student) will (action) (Criteria)."

Steps six, seven and eight are implementation and feedback steps. Once the student begins working on the goal (step six), s/he must evaluate the performance (step seven). This might include taking notes on his/her own performance, or reviewing data or grades with the teacher. Finally, the student and teacher must identify changes in the action, conditions, criteria or supports necessary to achieve success. Once the changes are made, the feedback loop begins again.

Summary

Data suggest that there are several benefits to student led IEPs (McGahee, Mason, Wallace, & Jones, 2001). These include a student's better understanding of disability, the law and their own learning. Teacher-student interactions improve as they discuss the IEP process. Parents see benefits of self confidence and personal knowledge in their children. But perhaps most important is the self-direction and choice making experienced by the students. They learn to make important decisions about their lives, which can help as they enter the adult world.

References

McGahee, M., Mason, C., Wallace, T., & Jones, B. (2001). *Student-led IEPs: A guide for student involvement*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

McGahee, M., Tucker, H., & Zamarippa, J. (2001). Creating a local process and program for student led IEPs. In M. McGahee, C. Mason, T. Wallace, and B. Jones, *Student-led IEPs: A guide for student involvement*, p.8. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children

Van Dycke, J.L., & Peterson, L.Y. (2003). Eight steps to help students develop IEP goals. *Today*, 10(4), 13.