

## Increasing Capacity for Developing High-Quality IEPs/IFSPs

### Unanswered Questions from the Symposium

This document contains questions that were asked by audience members during the symposium on June 18, 2018 and were not able to be answered during the live session. Following the live event, symposium speakers and OSEP staff provided the answers below.

#### **Is it possible that the present emphasis will be more on the child's unique individual needs and potential RATHER than on the general curriculum?**

>>David Bateman: The *Endrew F.* decision focuses on meeting the student's individual needs. When we assess students, we try to emphasize how they will be functioning in the general education curriculum, but sometimes we also need to focus on behaviors, for which there may be acceptable expectations but there are no clear general education standards. Additionally, as students' needs change over time, we need to pay close attention to what is presented to us so that in the future we can hopefully target general education goals and competencies.

#### **How do we set baselines for IEPs that are challenging, appropriately ambitious, and measurable?**

>>David Bateman: By accurately assessing where the child is currently functioning. As was noted in the symposium, we cannot make plans for where the child is expected to be functioning without a clear picture of where they currently are. We need to make IEPs that move the child forward, and then monitor the student's progress. We can work to predict the future, but it is only through effective progress monitoring of a student that we can determine if changes need to be made. Additionally, IEP teams should use previous IEP goals to give some guidance about what the student may be able to do after a year, and then work to push the student to master future goals while providing them the necessary supports.

#### **What are the procedures for monitoring fidelity in both teaching participation in the IEP as well as the data collection process?**

>>Laura Brown: Monitoring fidelity for students is individualized based on each student's unique abilities. In Georgia's Self-Determination Guide, there is a parental self-assessment that can be used to assess the parents' understanding and participation in the IEP process.

#### **You mentioned partnerships in your discussion about ASPIRE. Can you tell us about how these partnerships have supported this work?**

>>Laura Brown: We have partnered with Georgia's Council on Development Disabilities, Georgia's Parent Mentor Partnership, Parent to Parent of Georgia, and our regional technical assistance centers to assist with training, coaching, and sustainability of ASPIRE. These partnerships have been essential in allowing Georgia to scale-up our efforts.

#### **You discussed several of the benefits of ASPIRE. Could you speak to some of the challenges you encountered in implementing this initiative?**

>>Laura Brown: There are many benefits for students, families, and educators in implementing a student-led IEP process; however, we did encounter challenges with parents attending face-to-face ASPIRE training sessions. Web-based efforts, print materials, and mini-training sessions during parent conferences and phone calls have helped involve more parents in training.

### **For other states that want to implement a student led IEP process, what's a good first step?**

>>Laura Brown: As states consider implementing a student-led IEP process, we encourage starting with conversations with all stakeholders. In Georgia, we started with a small number of sites to assess our materials, training, and coaching before adding additional districts throughout the state. Before we added new sites, we gathered feedback and refined our processes. We invite states to review our materials online including the Self-Determination Guide. These materials can be found at [www.gaspdg.org](http://www.gaspdg.org).

### **What might a parent do if the principal is disengaged from the IEP process?**

Principals may not be the school's local educational agency representative in all states or districts. As a result, they may not have IEP meetings on their schedule to attend. In order for the principal to know that they should attend a meeting, parents may request in advance that a principal participate in their child's IEP meeting. Additionally, parents can also ask to meet with a principal throughout the school year to discuss their child's education. At these meetings, parents can start by discussing their child's strengths, what's working well at home, and any information about outside supports their child is receiving before moving into areas of concern. If a parent feels as though these meetings are still not resulting in the principal being actively engaged, they can send a letter to document a more formal concern. The Center for Parent Information and Resources provides a [letter template for discussing a problem](#) with their child's school.

### **How can secondary campuses help struggling readers while managing curriculum requirements?**

Struggling adolescent readers benefit from explicit instruction in word study, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. This instruction should take place across the curriculum, not only in English/Language Arts classes. Additionally, secondary schools should focus on building "disciplinary literacy" – the ways of thinking, skills, and tools that are used by experts in a field of study (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). For example, math instructors should teach students how to read strategically, make predictions, and understand the symbols and terminology of math (Hougen, 2014).

### **I agree with Ms. Bucka's statement that the family knows their child the best, however many IEP teams have difficulty in understanding/accepting this premise. Any ideas on how to breach this gap?**

>>Nicole Bucka: I still think the culture of not believing the parent knows the child best is about an inability to take the parent's perspective and to see the situation beyond our own (IEP team members'). I've noticed the educators or providers who have a child with special needs and have been "on the other side" intuitively "get it." So, the more work we can do starting at preservice to put the educators or providers in the shoes of a parent or family, the better. I perceive this could be done through role plays, family speakers/videos, or shadowing opportunities. Next, the local educational agency (LEA) at team meetings sets the tone for all professionalism in my opinion, so I look for LEA reps

who model and practice what they preach with regard to valuing parent input. Finally, in a perfect world, I would fundamentally alter IEP meeting protocols to be more family centered. For example, always have a pre-IEP call to gather a parent's view of what is working, what isn't, or how things could improve. Additionally, all reports/documents should be sent home in advance to avoid overwhelming parents. And, each meeting should start with expectations for all team members and an invitation to parents to be advocates and to ask questions. This should be explicitly stated by the school team.

#### References

- Hougen, M. (2014). Evidence-based reading instruction for adolescents, grades 6-12 (Document No. IC-13). Retrieved from University of Florida, Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability, and Reform Center website: <http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations/>
- Shanahan, T., & Shanahan, C. (2012). What is disciplinary literacy and why does it matter? *Topics in Language Disorders*, 32(1), 7-18. doi:10.1097/TLD.0b013e318244557a

Answers to these additional questions are provided as a resource to stakeholders. The contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government." (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1221e-3 and 3474).