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Preparing for Student Led IEPs

by

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PREPARING FOR STUDENT LED IEPS

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Abstract

Academic researchers believe that through participation in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, students develop a sense of responsibility and learn self-advocacy and self-determination. Students may participate in their IEPs beginning at the elementary level (Virginia Department of Education, “I’m Determined”, 2005). Most students were unprepared and lacked the social skills necessary to participate in or lead his or her IEP meeting. Attempts to remedy the situation focus on seeking additional support from home. After reviewing the current data and research, the author perceived a need for a parent manual to help families prepare students for their IEPs. An introduction to the IEP document, contents of the IEP, a comprehensible template to complete with the child, and additional resources are all provided within the manual. More specifically, the template provided for parents to review with their child is written in laymen’s terms to help parents to better explain the IEP process and sections to their children. This manual encourages parents to become more involved in assisting their children in achieving academic success, learning personal responsibility, and developing self-advocacy and self-determination skills.

Keywords: Accommodations, Disability, IEP, IEP Team, Self-Advocacy, and Self-Determination

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Chapter One: Definition of Problem

Introduction

“The best way to predict your future is to create it.”- Abraham Lincoln

While President Lincoln presumably did not have special education in mind when he wrote these words, they can apply to the IEP process, specifically involving students in the development of their education plan.

An IEP is a plan that is developed by a team to ensure that a qualified child with a disability under the law and attending elementary or a secondary educational institution is receiving specialized instruction and if necessary the appropriate related services.

Through student involvement in their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), the student develops a sense of responsibility, self-advocacy, and self-determination skills that facilitate in creating future goals and aspirations. As society burgeons intellectually and technologically, encouraging students to take control of their own education is vital to provide the steps in order to create a bright future. A student led IEP creates an environment wherein the student is directly involved with their education (Virginia Department of Education, “I’m Determined”, 2005). A student led IEP is an IEP that is explicitly developed and eventually presented by the student. An IEP is a plan that is developed by a team to ensure that a qualified child with a disability under the law and attending an elementary or a secondary educational institution is receiving specialized instruction and, if necessary, the appropriate related services. Student led IEPs are extremely beneficial and allow students to be more involved in their education. “Through research on student-led IEPs, we found that students and teachers alike reported that

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students using this process knew more about their disabilities, legal rights, and appropriate accommodations than other students and that students gained increased self-confidence and the ability to advocate for themselves” (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, Johnson, & Stillerman, 2002). Students can begin participating in their IEPs at the elementary school level with the goal and intention of continuing such participation through high school (Virginia Department of Education, “I’m Determined”, 2005).

The degree of student contribution varies; student contribution to the IEP procedure is methodically done in progression. Students at the elementary level may begin participating in IEPs by simply introducing the IEP team members, progressing to writing and presenting particular parts and eventually writing and leading the entirety of the meeting (Virginia Department of Education, “I’m Determined”, 2005). In order to construct an effective IEP a team convenes together in order to make sure the child’s needs are met; a team consisting of school personnel comes together to create the plan. Team members include: (a) the parents of the child; (b) child; (c) school administrator; (d) special education teacher; (e) general education teacher; (f) school psychologist; (g) school nurse; and (h) various specialists as needed, such as occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, and/or adapted physical education therapist. There are many approaches that teachers, parents, and students take to follow through with the meeting. Creating checklists are essential for assuring all members are well prepared for these meetings. “Understood.org” is an in depth webpage that provides explicit detail to better familiarize oneself with what an IEP is, who attends, why such meeting are held, and how often the meetings are to occur (“Understood,” 2014).

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Purpose of Project

The obligation of creating, presenting, and implementing an IEP is not the responsibility of one individual. An IEP is created, as a team, by the student's parents, general education teacher, special education teacher, an administrator, the school's psychologist and any other specialists such as occupational therapist, speech and language pathologist, and/or adapted physical education therapist (Stanberry, 2014). Allowing students to be a part of the IEP process not only gives them an opportunity to participate in their education, but it allows them to take initiative and responsibility for their own learning (Stanberry, 2014). A manual for parents serves as a tangible resource to, not only provide support for parents, but also encourage students to be self-sufficient. Providing this manual for parents bestows a sense of corroboration and guidance in order to better prepare their child for their IEP. The following manual offers an in depth guideline for the parents to follow in order to sufficiently coach their child to be prepared to lead or participate in their IEP.

Significance of Project

This project will benefit students, parents, and all educational staff. Creating a manual to assist in the directive and preparation of student led IEPs, will also enhance relationships and partnerships among students, parents, teachers, and communities (CADRE, 2016). Preparing students to eventually take on a decision-making role leads to an increase of student engagement. Ultimately, the student develops stronger self-advocacy and self-determination skills (CADRE, 2016). Along with these skills, the student gains a greater understanding of his or her disability and what accommodations

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are best for him or her (CADRE, 2016). Overall, student led IEPs create a fundamental bond between parent, teacher and student, thus creating an environment for inclusive positive communication between all members of the team (CADRE, 2016).

Summary of Chapter

As a child develops his or her own perception of his or her disability and the impact he or she has on his or her education, the child's self-advocacy, self-determination, and problem solving skills develop and aid in reaching goals and improving academic and social skills. This manual facilitates parents and assists in developing quality relationships involving student, parent and teacher; thereby creating a positive environment in which the student can develop.

“In a student-led IEP, the student actively participates in the development of his or her IEP and takes a leadership role in decision-making about his or her future” (CADRE, 2016). “Students gain greater awareness of the impacts of their disabilities and develop critical self-advocacy and problem-solving skills that will help them to reach their goals, improve their academic and postsecondary outcomes, and become leaders in their own lives and futures” (CADRE, 2016). Student-led IEPs also develop relationships as well as partnerships involving the student, parent, and community” (CADRE, 2016).

Definitions

“Accommodations- Changes that allow a person with a disability to participate fully in an activity. Examples include extended time, different test formats, and alterations to a classroom” (“Special Education Terms,” 2009).

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“Disability- Physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities” (“Special Education Terms,” 2009).

“Individualized Education Plan (IEP)-Special education term outlined by federal law to define the written document that states the disabled child’s goals, objectives, and services for students receiving special education” (“Special Education Terms,” 2009).

“Individualized Education Program Team- Term used to describe the committee of parents, teachers, administrators and school personnel that provides services to the student. The committee may also include medical professionals and other relevant parties. The team reviews assessment results, determines goals and objectives, and program placement for the child needing services” (“Special Education Terms,” 2009).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents a variety of relevant themes based upon research data and the law. It includes the elements of an Individualized Education Program (IEP), how to assist students in preparing for their meetings, and the benefits obtained when students participate in the planning, and implementation of their IEP meetings.

Elements of an IEP

The main ideas of this section are to briefly identify and define special education and then thoroughly examine the components of an IEP. Knowledge of the various mechanisms included in the IEP is of utmost importance. As discussed below, there are numerous aspects of the document that must be mastered in order to have a successful meeting.

According to the U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity website, Individuals with Disabilities Act, U.S.C. section 1400 (2004) defines Special Education is an all-encompassing expression used to describe specialized instruction, support and services to students who have been identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Act. Children who qualify for special education services have been assessed and are deemed eligible for services through an identified disability and that disability must adversely affect the educational performance, as well as require a specialized instructional program (Department of Defense Education Activity, 2016). There are many steps in the special education process. First, the child is identified as potentially having a disability and pre-referral interventions are introduced. If interventions are not successful, then a formal

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referral is made, and the response to intervention team (RTI) meet and make the decision to create an assessment plan. After parent consent is acquired, assessments are conducted. Once assessments have been completed, the IEP team compiles a report setting out the results. This report is attached to the IEP. An individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting is held among all necessary team members. If the assessment results indicate a disability, the student qualifies for services. When all members agree and all signatures have been added to the document the plan is implemented.

The law provides that once a year thereafter, the team meets to review the IEP (Department of Defense Education Activity, 2016). This meeting is referred to as an annual review. This meeting is used to track the student's present performance levels and decide on goals for the next year. Every three years, a triennial IEP is held to determine if services are still needed. Students receive services until they exit the program, typically at high school graduation or when they turn twenty-two years of age.

An individualized education program (IEP) is a legally binding document that is intended to focus on the child's specific learning difficulties and include academic (and behavioral) goals for the following year (Stanberry, 2014). Along with identifying the child's disability and goals, related services, present levels of performance, supports and services, and modifications and accommodations, are all included in the IEP (Stanberry, 2014). Every IEP is developed to meet the exclusive needs of a specific child, so no two IEPs will be the same. Although all IEPs are unique, they must include all of the foregoing elements.

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Present levels of performance describe the child's current weaknesses, strengths and abilities, academically, behaviorally and physically. Supports and services include what specific forms of support will be provided to the student, along with the specific amount of time per week, or in other cases the amount of time in a day or a month the child will receive services. For example, the child may receive specialized academic instruction four hours a week. Modifications and accommodations are the changes that occur in the general education classroom to assist the student in meeting his or her goals. A second example would be that the child might be allotted more time to complete assignments. Annual goals are created to be realistic, achievable, and measurable and are either academic or functional skill based (Stanberry, 2014).

Student Participation

This section is intended to inform the reader regarding the outcomes of student participation in his or her IEP meeting. Current academic research shows that there are numerous benefits to allowing students to participate in their IEPs (CADRE, 2016).

“In a student-led IEP, the student actively participates in the development of his or her IEP and takes a leadership role in decision-making about his or her future” (CADRE, 2016). Various studies have suggested that students who participate in their IEPs advance their self-determination skills, and develop a better understanding of their disability and what accommodations they require (CADRE, 2016). Additionally, students, parents, and teachers build relationships and there is an increase in participation from all parties (CADRE, 2016).

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Observations of IEP meetings and discussions with parents, teachers and students after student led IEP meetings indicate that students at the elementary level are fully capable of participating in their IEP meetings (Bottge, Danneker, 2009). Students were successfully proficient at communicating what their disability was, goals, and necessary accommodations for the following year. As students develop skills to participate in their IEP meetings, they begin to develop self-reliance, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills (Bottge, Danneker, 2009).

“Life can present challenges and major changes for all young people. Self-determination allows young people to make choices and decisions to direct their own lives. Self-directed learning encompasses choice- and decision-making skills” (Virginia Department of Education, “I’m Determined”, 2005). As students begin to participate in their IEP meetings at the elementary level, they begin to develop the necessary skills to eventually present the entirety of their meetings (Virginia Department of Education, “I’m Determined”, 2005). “I’m Determined” provides a plethora of resources for parents, students and teachers to use that begin in preschool and proceed up to and including high school (Virginia Department of Education, “I’m Determined”, 2005).

“The IEP process is only one forum where students with disabilities can demonstrate self-determination skills” (Sitlington et al., 2007, p. 37). As students actively engage in the IEP process, in addition to gaining self-determination skills, they continue to take ownership of their IEP goals and overall involvement in their education (Grosser, 2015).

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Research suggests that the environment in which a student achieves self-determination skills is just as critical as the people, such as parents, in the student's lives (Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, Wood, 2004). In order to help the student become successful, the parents and other team members must honor choices and decisions the student makes, support goals the student has set, and encourage self-determination skills and behavior (Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, Wood, 2004). Self-determination serves as an umbrella for a number of terms such as choice making, problem solving skills, decision making skills, goal setting and attainment skills, self-regulation skills, self-advocacy, self-awareness (or self-knowledge), and self-efficacy (Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, Wood, 2004).

Although self-determination is not required by educational standards, it is certainly desirable. As students become more involved in their IEP meetings, they achieve these skills and, in turn, create a positive affiliation with learning and becoming self-confident in their future educational and professional endeavors (Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, Wood, 2004).

There are various methods available to include students in their IEP process. Students can be involved in all aspects of their IEP, including planning, gathering of information, outlining and contributing in the meeting (Test, Uphold, Walker, 2007). All resources can be modified to meet the unique needs of individual students (Test, Uphold, Walker, 2007).

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Implementation of Student Led IEP

In order to effectively implement student led IEPs, it is imperative that students are prepared and organized. According to an article entitled “How to Help Students Lead Their IEP Meetings”, depending on the student’s age and capability, his or her participation typically occurs on a three level scale (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, Johnson, 2004).

Level 1 participation includes the student presenting information about his or her plan for the future. An example of this would be a student stating a future goal such as becoming an Author, and then planning out the steps this student will need in order to reach that goal. Level 2 includes the student explaining his or her disability, his or her strengths and weaknesses, also known as the present levels of performance, as well as what accommodations are necessary to be successful. In this situation, the student would describe his or her disability in addition to discussing what his or her strengths and weaknesses are and what is needed in order to be more successful in the classroom. At level 3, the student leads the entirety of the meeting (Johnson, Mason, McGahee-Kovac, 2004). At this stage, the student would begin the meeting with introductions, present all sections of the IEP and also properly close the meeting by thanking all present members as well as receiving appropriate signatures. Breaking up the student participation by levels allows for student participation to gradually increase in a defined and predictable way. With a gradual increase in participation, the student is more likely to be comfortable and have less anxiety about participating.

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“Students may take on many different roles in a student-led IEP. The variety of roles provides the opportunity to adapt the student-led IEP process to the unique needs of the student” (“Student-Led IEPs,” pg. 9, 2002). As students become familiar with and accustomed to the idea of preparing, gathering information and presenting that information at their IEP meetings, it is important they recognize the process that takes place to effectively present a student led IEP. In order to achieve the best outcome, students must learn to plan out what it is they are going to say during the meeting, perhaps creating an outline. They may prepare by collecting work samples, and or making copies of the IEP document for team members. Gathering information may include obtaining grades, and researching his or her assessment results. Presenting information effectively is the result of actual practicing of the oral component of the IEP. This manual provides resources for parents to use and practice with their children in order to complete these tasks.

Less complex roles students may play include introducing themselves and others they know at the meeting, talking about interests and dislikes at school or more involved roles such as developing and disseminating invitations to the meeting, writing sections or all of the IEP (“Student-Led IEPs,” 2002).

Students are the most important part of the IEP, and the IEP itself must be uniquely developed to fit his or her needs (Puckett, 2016). While this is an accepted fact in the field of special education, it may seem extraordinary that students are not required to be active participants in their IEP meetings until transition services are needed in the later grades. Due to this lack of involvement, students often attend these meetings

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vulnerable, unprepared, unrehearsed, and unskilled (Puckett, 2016). The concept of student-led IEPs arose in response to these very situations. (Puckett, 2016). This project aims to allow parents to bring the IEP preparation process home and become acquainted with all of the components of the IEP, while preparing their children to participate in their IEPs.

Natalie R. Puckett began preparing her students for their own IEPs by asking them a set of questions designed to elicit information about each child's present levels as well as taking time to discuss and teach self-determination skills and the value of these skills to all people (Puckett, 2016).

The literature further reveals that student led IEPs are not yet the norm in today's school systems. In fact, "many students continue to be left out of their own planning meetings" (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, Johnson, Stillerman, 2002). However, observations and data collection also shows that teachers note significant student involvement in IEPs amplifies self-confidence and self-advocacy in students (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, Johnson, Stillerman, 2002).

The implementation of student-led individual IEP meetings is an empowering, self-motivating voyage of which students must take advantage and in which they must participate (Ellis, 2011). In order to effectively implement student led IEPs, it is both the teacher's and parent's responsibilities to communicate with the child. The consistent dialogue within this triad needs to be an ongoing discussion and cover questions and concerns from all participants (Ellis, 2011).

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Summary of Chapter

Fostering the development of skills necessary to prepare, gather information and participate in their IEP meetings allows children to ascertain a great deal about themselves as well as about the IEP process. This chapter provides a variety of research data to support the foregoing conclusion. The “U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity” website was cited briefly to define special education and a study by Kristin Stanberry was cited extensively, providing an in depth description of the elements of an IEP.

“I’m Determined” and “Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE)” justify the benefits and outcomes of student participation in his or her IEP meeting. Various studies cited all provide methods on how to assist students in preparing for their meetings, and the benefits realized by students who participate in the planning, gathering of information and implementation of their IEP meetings. “Student-Led IEP” along with numerous studies all offer advice to help students lead their IEPs, how to make meetings work, along with the benefits and barriers of student led IEPs.

The overarching conclusion drawn from the research underscores the necessity for the student to participate in his or her IEP from an early age. This project described and provided in the following chapters aims to support this specific goal: to serve as a guide to the current IEP process. An IEP is about the child. This project allows parents to not only ready their children but also helps them teach their children the necessary skills needed to assemble and facilitate their own IEPs.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

Modern academic researchers believe that through involvement in their IEPs, students develop a sense of responsibility, and learn self-advocacy, and self-determination skills that facilitate creating future goals and aspirations (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, Johnson, 2004). As society continuously grows and evolves both socially and technologically, encouraging students to take control of their own education is vital. It has become essential for teachers working with students from diverse home environments to provide their students with the tools necessary to create a bright future for them. A student led Individualized Education Plan creates an environment during the team meeting in which the student is directly involved with his or her education (Virginia Department of Education, “I’m Determined”, 2005). “In a student-led IEP, the student actively participates in the development of his or her IEP and takes a leadership role in decision-making about his or her future” (CADRE, 2016). “Students gain greater awareness of the impacts of their disabilities and develop critical self-advocacy and problem-solving skills that will help them to reach their goals, improve their academic and postsecondary outcomes, and become leaders in their own lives and futures” (CADRE, 2016). Student-led IEPs also develop relationships and partnerships involving the student, parent, and community” (CADRE, 2016).

Design

After reviewing existing research, the author concluded that creating a parent manual to support families in preparing children for their IEPs was vital for students to

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achieve the most success and to feel empowered after participating in their own IEP meetings. The objective of *Preparing for Student Led IEPs* was to provide a handbook for parents to refer to, as they prepared their child for his or her meeting. The design of the manual was intended to be easily comprehensible and could be utilized by all parents.

The development of the manual included field-testing strategies, implementing various approaches and honing these into a specific collection of activities and instruction for parents to use with their child. In order to create a manual that was effective, the researcher had to reflect on the outcomes of field-testing strategies with students. By reflecting on the data collected from students, the researcher was aware of the lack of skills and the needs of students prior to participating in IEP meetings. The researcher took these identified needs of the students, sought to utilize the nurturing and competence of parents, and constructed a manual that met the needs of students. Drawing from current research, the primary needs of upper elementary students with IEPs included: (a) responsibility, (b) self-determination skills, and (c) self-advocacy. Including these findings in the compilation of the manual both refined and improved the efficacy of the manual in its entirety.

Participants/Setting

The manual, *Preparing for Student Led IEP*, as described in detail in Chapter Four, was proven effective for parents who were proactive and decided to aid their child in preparing for his or her IEP meeting. The manual was used in a pilot study by this researcher over a period of one year with continuous parent and student feedback following each meeting. *Preparing for Student Led IEPs* was most successful when used

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in a tranquil, relaxed, and familiar setting. The most effective outcomes were obtained when parents became aware of their child's IEP meeting date at the beginning of the school year, allowing them time to properly plan and practice prior to the meeting. Parents were able to support their children in developing goals, activities and actions to support those goals, and practice as needed in order to properly be prepared for the IEP meeting.

Procedures

Students often struggle with becoming aware of the differing elements of their IEPs. Following the manual, *Preparing for Student Led IEPs* is structured to be an effective means of familiarizing students with the elements contained in their IEPs and improving their effectiveness in participating in the actual IEP meetings. Furthermore, the researcher found that students were generally unaware of the components of IEP document, uninformed of how the IEP meeting worked procedurally and felt intimidated by the thought of presenting information to adults in a structured meeting. In exploring with parents their needs to enable them to effectively aid in preparing their children for IEP meetings, the researcher found that many of the parents were uncertain about how to appropriately support their children prior to the IEP meeting. For instance, some parents were concerned that their child was not mature enough to acquire and articulate the social skills necessary in order to effectively participate in his or her IEP meeting.

This manual is focused specifically on guiding parents to appropriately prepare their child for his or her IEP meeting. The manual begins with an introduction to student participation in his or her IEP meeting. Additionally, the manual provides a leaflet that is

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comprehensible and user friendly. The purpose for this is to familiarize the parent and student with elements within the IEP as well as begin to prepare the student to be aware of what the document is and how it is created in order to provide the best support and services. A template is provided to use in accumulating the information that defines the present levels of performance, annual goals, services, accommodations, and participation in statewide testing. An example of what a student agenda should look like and additional exercises and defined legal terms were also included in the manual. The opening section of the manual entitled *Introduction* included an abstract to provide parents and students an introduction to the process of preparing students to be participants in IEP meetings, as well as examples of positive outcomes obtained through the use of the manual.

To that end, the researcher devised a template entitled, *Making sense of my IEP*, for parents to read, discuss, and complete with their child. This template examined the different sections of the IEP that the child would become familiar with in order to be an active and effective participant in the meeting. Sections of the manual were for work by both parent and child, including; (a) present levels of performance, (b) accommodations, (c) annual goals, (d) services, (e) participation in state testing, and (f) creating an overall agenda for the meeting. Additionally, as parents provided students with the template, *Making sense of my IEP*, the researcher found it useful to also provide to the parents practice exercises for the parents to encourage their child to continue to persevere.

Since parents are, generally, considered as the ultimate role models and teachers for their children, professionals sometimes forget that parents may be unaware of the

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legal terms applicable to special education and the vocabulary that is used during IEP meetings. Thus, the researcher found it appropriate to provide a list of legal and specialized terms used in special education and IEP meetings. Lastly, an assortment of additional resources was provided to further support parents as they prepare their children for participation in the IEP meeting. A list of contacts throughout San Diego City School Districts and webinars were provided to serve as further support.

Summary of Chapter

Research suggests that students with disabilities are fully capable of participating in their IEP meetings (Test, Uphold, Walker, 2007). Such participation includes planning, as well as gathering and presenting of information. Students often struggle with becoming aware of and understanding the specific goals and focal points of their IEPs. Following the manual, *Preparing for Student Led IEPs* proved to be an effective means of familiarizing students with the elements contained in their IEPs and improved their effectiveness in participating in the actual IEP meetings.

As parents learned the importance of student participation in their child's IEP, the parents became better equipped to help prepare their child for their IEP meeting. For example, in one test case the parent was unaware of the benefits and the personal skills that the student acquires from participating in his or her IEP team meeting. This researcher found that the use of the manual promoted responsibility, ownership, and self-determination in participating students, and promoted positive interactions and relationships with their parents and teachers. For example, during the study, it became apparent that interpersonal relationships improved across the board among students with

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both their teachers and their parents. The frequent result was that students were more at ease during their IEP meetings and felt well prepared and more confident.

Chapter Four: Project

Preparing for Student Led IEPS

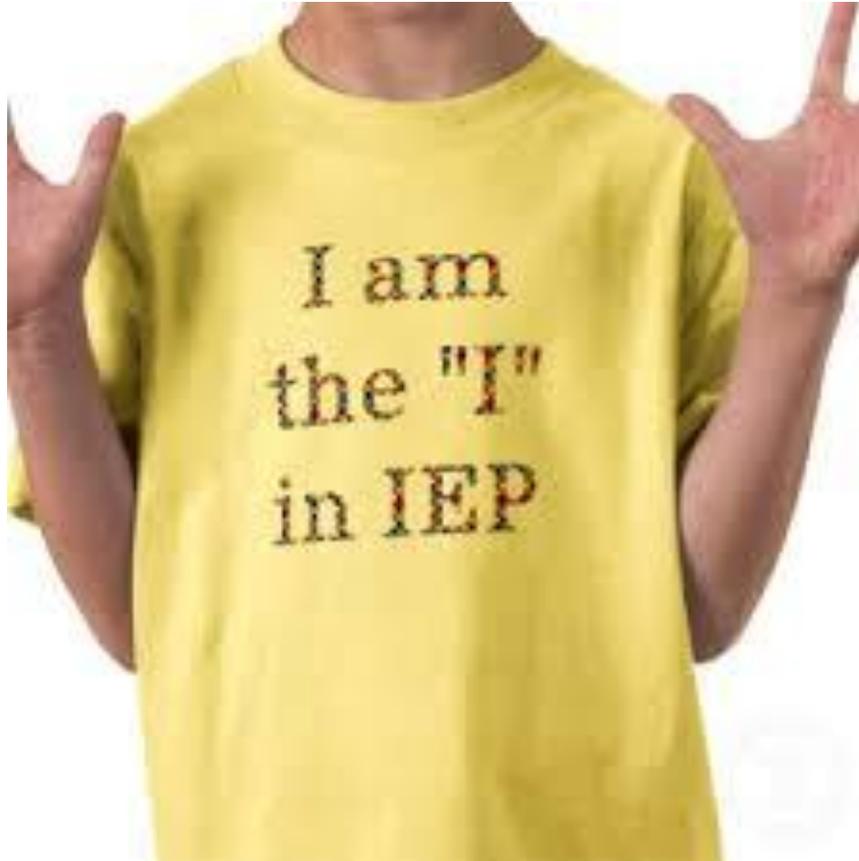


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Created by
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Intro

The following introduction has been excerpted from Mandy Ellis' 2011 article, "The Empowerment through Engagement: Implementing Student-led IEPs."

"The implementation of student-led individual education plan (IEP) meetings is an empowering; self-motivating voyage students must take advantage of and participate in. This methodology is used to encourage students to partake and develop self-determinations skills as well as become self-advocates in their learning and assist in the development of their IEP" (Ellis, 2011).

"Student-led IEPs sponsor self-determination in students with special needs. With the guidance and close support of parents and special education teachers, students learn how to record their progress toward individualized goals, and gain an understanding of the purpose and components of the IEP document" (Ellis, 2011).

"Benefits of implementing student-led IEPs include increased involvement of families as well as an increased student voice. Collaboration among student, parent, and teacher result in a direct manifestation and plan that target each individual's needs" (Ellis, 2011).

"In order to effectively implement student led IEPs it is both the teacher and parent's responsibility to communicate with the child. The constant dialogue within this triad should be ongoing and cover questions and concerns from all participants" (Ellis, 2011).

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“Typically IEPs are printed, filed, and locked away to ensure confidentiality. Resulting in students having limited to no access to their very own IEP. In order for students to effectively learn and become aware of the elements within the IEP document, teachers and parents must provide access to such documents with the understanding of it being confidential” (Ellis, 2011).

“Once the child is familiar with his or her IEP, it is time for the student to really begin gathering information, becoming aware of his or her academics and ultimately begin to think about their future IEP meeting. In order to get the ball rolling, provide the child with a binder. This binder will contain everything related to the IEP meeting. The binder serves as a pioneer for the child to practice self-regulation skills, self-advocacy skills, self-knowledge skills, and overall self-determination skills. It is the teacher and parent’s responsibility to check in with the child monthly to regulate any carelessness or inattentiveness” (Ellis, 2011).

“As the meeting date begins to arrive, teachers, parents and student must have a meeting 5-10 days prior to the meeting date to go over the agenda, and have a mock meeting. This allows the student to not only practice but to work out any kinks they may be struggling with. With any public speaking, students may shy away or be completely overwhelmed with the idea of leading their meeting. That is okay! Special education is all about accommodating, at the teacher and parents discretion it okay for the child to create a PowerPoint, or short video (previously recorded) that is embedded in the meeting” (Ellis, 2011).

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“As the meeting date arrives, your child must be prepared to greet (verbally or nonverbally) the IEP team members as they come in. Prior to the meeting, the special education teacher will review the procedural safeguards and then look to the child to begin introductions and carry on with the appropriate sections according to what was planned prior to the meeting ” (Ellis, 2011).

“As the meeting comes to an end, congratulation is in order! Applaud your child on their success and ability to prepare, create, and present their IEP meeting. Emphasize to your child that in conducting the skills needed in preparing for their IEP they have become better critical thinkers, technologically aware, and obtained life skills that they will continue to use and master ” (Ellis, 2011).

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Rationale

Existing research suggests that through students' involvement in their IEPs, students develop a sense of responsibility, self-advocacy, and self-determination skills that foster the ability to create future goals and aspirations. As society continuously develops, encouraging students to take control of their own education is vital to provide the tool with which they can create a bright future for themselves. Allowing students to be a part of their IEP process not only provides them an opportunity to participate in their education, but it allows them to begin to take responsibility for their own learning (Stanberry, 2014). By creating a manual for parents/guardians, a tangible resource becomes available to not only provide support for parent participation but also encourage the child to be self-sufficient.

During the child's IEP process, parent involvement and participation promotes a safe and tranquil home environment, positive attitude about school, and enhancement in social skills ("Research Spotlight," 2002). Parental instinct and intuition provide a sense of fulfillment however it is fact that parents want to assist their children as they begin their journey to success in life ("Research Spotlight," 2002). As parents are involved in their child's IEP process, by creating a team approach the child benefits by encouraging the best academically, as well as learning valuable social and behavioral outcomes. Ultimately, resulting in the rise of the child's confidence. Research suggests that parents who are involved in their child's lives result in young successful adults through college and well into their adult career ("Research Spotlight," 2002). Although teachers spend majority of their day with the children, parents are exposed to different behaviors that

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may not be observed at school. Affective, social goals are often neglected but necessary for long-term student success (“Social and Emotional,” 2015). Social, emotional, and behavioral goals help contribute to lifelong learning (“Social and Emotional,” 2015). Studies show that students who possess social, emotional and behavioral goals acquire skills such as being able to recognize and manage emotions for example controlling difficult situations, establish positive relationships for example teacher-to-student, make responsible decisions such as placement in a leadership role, i.e. running an IEP, and the development of empathy and sympathy for others such as feeling excitement for a friend who passed a test (“Social and Emotional,” 2015).

Furthermore, parents may wish to support their children in order for them to develop life skills such as: “reading and writing in context, thinking and planning for the future, goal setting, introducing people and closing meetings with gratitude, taking turns and inviting others to speak, asking relevant and proactive questions, advocating and proposing solutions, using technology to take notes or present meetings, listening and responding with appropriate answers, and using presentation skills such as eye contact, tone, volume, posture, body language” (Hawbaker, 2007).

This manual presents a rationale, purpose and specific guidance for parents to use in order to better prepare their child for his or her IEP. This manual offers a step-by-step guide for the parents to follow with the child in order to suitably coach the child to be prepared to lead or participate in his or her IEP. As the parent guides the child through the preparation process, it is imperative that the communication between parent and child be balanced and positive. The parent must take on both a nurturing and instructional role

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in order to effectively communicate and support the child through this process. As the parent and child begin to work together, a team-like relationship and collaborative atmosphere is established, thus making the transition from home to school smooth as all team members come together. Bridging this gap provides ample opportunity for the team to grow together and to ensure that the child's best interests are put forth first.

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Getting started: Helping your child become familiar with their IEP

- Review this chapter with the child. Be sure to have a copy of his/her current IEP in order to read each section and complete the following questions together. Be sure to use indirect prompting questions in order to allow your child to naturally answer the questions.

Making Sense of My IEP

Students in the upper elementary grades 3-5 will participate in presenting one or all of the following parts of their IEP:

- Present Levels of Performance
- Annual Goals
- Services
- Accommodations
- Participation in State testing

Present Level of Performance:

This part lists the child's preferences, interests, strengths and needs and may include a variety of academic and age appropriate transition assessment scores and explanations, observations, comments from the child, teachers, parents/guardians, and others.

Annual Goals:

What the child plans to accomplish in the next year. These cover a wide range of skills, not just academic goals. The goals include criteria based on the child's current levels, as

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well as how the progress of the goal will be measured, for example, teacher kept records or student work. Additionally, this template provides the parent an opportunity to express which goals they believe to be necessary for their child. While the teacher largely develops academic goals, affective social goals can be somewhat overlooked. As the parent reads and discusses this section with the child, the parent is to answer questions also. IEP goals must be specific, measurable, use actions words, realistic, and have a time frame (deadline); these are known as SMART goals.

Services:

The specific supports the child will need in order to reach his or her goals. Examples of service may include push in service, wherein the special education teacher or special education assistant goes into the general education classroom to serve the child's needs. Pull out service may include the child going to another classroom, away from the general education classroom in order to receive specialized academic instruction. The child may join a small group or work one on one with the special education teacher. Services are typically allocated and delivered to a student as hours per week.

Accommodations:

How the child's teacher(s) is (are) going to modify, or change my learning environment and or instruction, to alleviate the effect of my disability.

Participation in Statewide Testing:

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How will the child participate in the California statewide testing? This section will include what statewide tests the child will be taking, as well as the accommodations he or she may receive for each test.

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This template has been adapted from the Virginia Department of Education, “I’m Determined” project 2015: [I’m Determined](#)

Present Levels of Performance:

Read the present levels of performance in your current IEP with your parent/guardian and respond to the following questions:

1. Questions regarding my current present levels of performance?

2. What are my academic strengths?

3. How do I learn best in the classroom? (Visually, hands-on, tactile, etc.)

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4. What are my weaknesses, what subjects are difficult for me?

5. How do I feel about school? Do I like going to school?

6. This past year, how have my grades been?

7. This past year, how has my attendance been?

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8. This past year, how has my behavior been?

9. What are my hobbies? What interests me? What do I enjoy doing on the weekend?

10. What are my responsibilities at home?

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Annual Goals

Read the current goals in your IEP with your parent/guardian and respond to the following questions:

1. Are my current goals meeting all of my needs?

2. Am I close to meeting my current goals? What can I do to meet those goals?

3. What I think my future academic goals should be and why? Should they focus on reading, writing, and or math?

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4. What I think my future social goals should be and why?

5. What I think my future behavior goals should be and why?

Parents: Answer the following questions:

1. Academic subjects I believe my child is having difficulty in:

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2. Socially, I believe my child is transcending by:

3. Socially, I believe my child needs support with:

4. Behaviorally, I believe my child is:

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5. Behaviorally, I believe my child needs guidance with:

Parent to discuss and practice creating a **SMART** goal with child:

Descriptions and examples of SMART goals adapted from the “WrightsLaw” website:

[SMART goals](#)

Specific: What are the target areas of academic achievement and functional performance?

These include precise descriptions of skills that will be taught. For example: Writing would be the target area of academic achievement and the skill would be writing in a complete coherent sentence. What specific target area and skill have been discussed?

Measurable: Measurable means the goal can be counted. Counting or observing a goal permits parents and teachers record progress. For example: When given 5 word problems, the student will correctly answer 2 out of 3 mathematical reasoning word problems with 80% accuracy. How will this goal be measured?

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Action word: IEP goals include action words. For example: “The child will be able to...

The child will increase the number of sight words when reading a grade level book.”

What action words will be used?

Realistic: The genuine objective that pertains to the child’s explicit need as a result from the specific disability. For example: The student will improve reading skills by fluently reading informative text and correctly answering 2 out of 3 questions about the text.

What is a realistic goal?

Time-limited: Goals are created with the intention of being met or close to being met annually. Goals must include what the child needs to know after receiving special

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education services for one year. Be sure to include the student's present level in order to adequately track progress. For example: At the end of the year the student will write a complete paragraph including a thesis statement, supporting evidence, and a conclusion.

What time-limit will be used (be sure to include present level)?

Services:

Read the services in your current IEP with your parent/guardian and respond to the following questions:

1. What special education services do I receive? (SAI, Push-In, Speech, OT, APE)

If I receive Speech/OT/APE answer the following question:

Circle Y for yes or N for no:

Do I receive Speech services? Y N

Do I receive occupational therapy services? Y N

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Do I receive adapted physical education services? Y N

2. List of supports that are beneficial to me in the classroom as well as outside of the classroom?

Accommodations:

Read the accommodations in your current IEP with you parent/guardian and respond to the following questions:

1. What accommodations are most helpful to me in the classroom?

2. Are there accommodations not listed that I may need?

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3. Are there accommodations listed that I may not need?

State Achievement Assessments (testing such as DRDP, CST, CMA, CAPA, and

CAHSEE):

Read the testing portion of your current IEP with your parent/guardian and respond to the following questions:

1. Do I understand that I will be included in state testing?

2. Am I aware of the accommodations I will receive during testing?

What are they?

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How I plan to participate in this year's IEP:

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Once the parent and child have decided how he or she will be participating in the IEP, create an agenda for the meeting. The parent may wish to provide the following template as a guideline for the child or be creative!

My IEP Agenda

Teacher to produce and explain procedural safeguards before meeting begins

- Introductions!
 - Introduce myself and allow the fellow members to introduce themselves.
- Discuss how (good/bad why?) the school year is going so far.
- Present my present levels
 - Share my strengths, and interests.
- Present my goals
 - Discuss how I have met my current goals.
 - Share what I believe my goals should be for the following year.
- Ask team if there are any questions or concerns at this time?
- Invite parents to share their thoughts and concerns.
- Invite general education teacher to share his or her thoughts and concerns.
- Invite related services providers to share their thoughts and concerns.
- Invite special education teacher to share his or her thoughts and concerns, as well as all other sections of the IEP.
- Last opportunity to ask if anyone has any additional questions or thoughts they would like to contribute.

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- Allow signatures to take place with team members (Teacher to facilitate this step as needed).
- Conclude by thanking team for attending.

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Practice Exercises

In order to better prepare your child for their IEP, there are a plethora of exercises to do prior to the meeting. Listed below are exercises that are helpful.

1. **Setting the stage-**You must create an environment in which an IEP is typically held. This means, where you choose to practice should be quiet and have a table adequate for all participants to sit.
2. **Be organized!** Have all documents in order prior to meeting-You must have at least two copies of your child's IEP in hand as well any student work to present during meeting. Having an IEP binder or specific folder for all documents works best.
3. **An agenda is crucial-**Having an agenda allows for a smooth, meaningful and timely meeting.
4. **Power Point or Poster-**Creating a visual aid for the meeting is a great way to show skills as well as guide the child throughout the meeting.
5. **Self-advocacy skills-**Teaching your child to be aware and make his or her own decisions is vital and a very important aspect of preparing for leading the IEP. As the parent, you must emphasize the importance of standing up for himself or herself in a manner that is stern yet still professional. Your child must know his or her rights and responsibilities.
6. **Self -Knowledge skills-**Don't keep secrets about your child's disability from him or her! Although, this may be difficult for you to fathom, your child is the one living with this disability. It is imperative that he or she fully understands what his

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or her disability is and how to live with it. In addition to being aware of his or her own state, you must also teach your child to recognize how one individual's actions may influence others.

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Legal Terms

The following terms are derived from “UnderstandingSpecialEducation.com.”

“Special Education Law- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA):

Special education is a broad term used to by the law to describe specially designed instruction that meets the unique needs of a child who has a disability. These services are provided by the public school system and are free. Services include instruction in the classroom, at home, in hospitals and institutions. To qualify, a child must have one of the identified disabilities AND it must adversely affect their educational performance”

(“Special Education,” 2009).

“Individualized Education Plan (IEP): Special education term outlined by IDEA to define the written document that states the disabled child's goals, objectives and services for students receiving special education” (“Special Education,” 2009).

“Individualized Education Program Team: Term used to describe the committee of parents, teachers, administrators and school personnel that provides services to the student. The committee may also include medical professional and other relevant parties. The team reviews assessment results, determines goals and objectives and program placement for the child needing services” (“Special Education,” 2009).

“SST: Student Study Team; a group that evaluates a child’s performance makes recommendations for success and develops a formal plan. The team includes the classroom teacher, parents, and educational specialists. They may make a recommendation for a special education evaluation” (“Special Education,” 2009).

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“Accommodations: Changes that allow a person with a disability to participate fully in an activity. Examples include extended time, different test format, and alterations to a classroom” (“Special Education,” 2009).

“Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The placement of a special needs student in a manner promoting the maximum possible interaction with the general school population. Placement options are offered on a continuum including regular classroom with no support services, regular classroom with support services, designated instruction services, special day classes and private special education programs” (“Special Education,” 2009).

“Mainstreaming: Term used to describe the integration of children with special needs into regular classrooms for part of the school day. The remainder of the day is in a special education classroom” (“Special Education,” 2009).

“Occupational Therapists (OT): Provide consultation and support to staff to improve a student’s educational performance related to fine motor, gross motor and sensory integration development” (“Special Education,” 2009).

“Adapted Physical Education (APE): Specially designed physical education program, using accommodations designed to fit the needs of students who require developmental or corrective instruction in PE” (“Special Education,” 2009).

“Speech and Language Specialists: Assesses students for possible delayed speech and language skills and provides direct services in the area of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. They are also available regarding hearing impairments and amplification” (“Special Education,” 2009).

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“School Psychologist: Assist in the identification of intellectual, social and emotional needs of students. They provide consultation and support to families and staff regarding behavior and conditions related to learning. They plan programs to meet the special needs of children and often serve as a facilitator during an IEP meeting” (“Special Education,” 2009).

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Additional Resources

There are many community resources to aid in preparing for IEPs. In this section, San Diego County locations, contacts, and websites for workshops, persons to contact, as well as webinars to view are provided.

San Diego School Districts with Resource Pages:

Southern

San Ysidro School District:

[San Ysidro School District Parent Support](#)

Director of Special Education: (619) 428-4476 Ext. 3032

Chula Vista Elementary School District:

[Chula Vista Elementary Parent Support](#)

Education Service and Support Center: (619) 425-9600 Ext. 1700

National School District:

[National School District Parent Support](#)

Director of Support Services: (619) 336-7740

Central

La Mesa-Spring Valley School District:

[La Mesa & Spring Valley School District Parent Support](#)

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Director, Special Education: (619) 668-5700 Ext. 6202

San Diego Unified School District:

[San Diego Unified School District Parent Support](#)

Parent Helpline (619) 725-7327

Poway Unified School District:

[Poway Unified School District Parent Support](#)

Special Education Department (858) 521-2800 Ext. 2216

Northern

Vista Unified School District:

[Vista Unified School District Parent Support](#)

Executive Director: (760) 726-2170 Ext. 92902

Escondido Union School District:

[Escondido Union School District Parent Support](#)

Community Outreach (760) 432-2381

North Coastal Consortium for Special Education:

[North Coast Special Education Parent Support](#)

(760) 761-5110

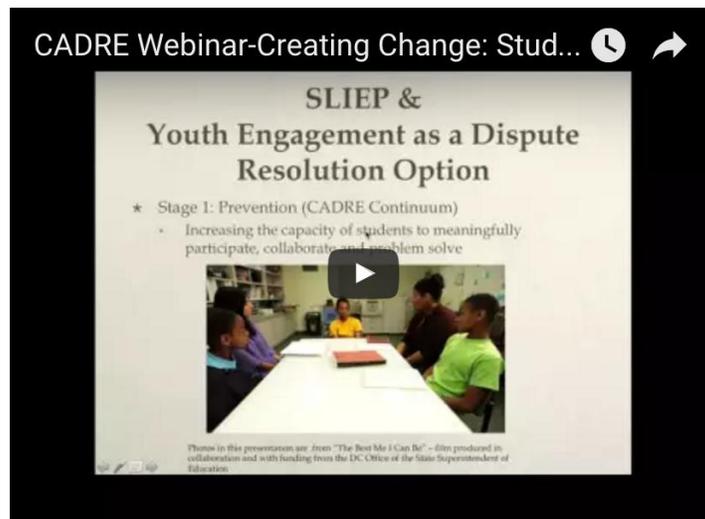
Webinars

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Creating Change: Student-Led IEPs & Youth Engagement as a Dispute Resolution

Option

Retrieved from: [CADRE Webinar](#)



What are the benefits of student-led IEPs? Watch our Webinar to find out!

Retrieved from: [Benefits of Student Led IEPs Webinar](#)

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Self-Determination and Student Led IEP Meetings

Retrieved from: [Self Determination in Student Led IEPs Webinar](#)



Student-Led IEP Meetings

Retrieved from: [Student Led IEP meetings Webinar](#)

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The purpose of this manual is to inform parents about how to adequately prepare their children to participate in or lead their IEP meetings. By the implementation of this manual, parents and students are able to work closely together to reach that goal. As parents work alongside their children, parents become more involved and their children learn responsibility, acquire self-advocacy, and self-determination skills. It is the fervent hope of this author that this manual is both effective and supportive for students and parents in preparing for successful IEPs and academic, social and personal success.

Chapter Five: Project Recommendations

The parent manual, “Preparing for Student Led IEPS” was envisioned and developed in order to help parents better prepare their children for student led IEPS. “Through research on student-led IEPS, we found that students and teachers alike reported that students using this process knew more about their disabilities, legal rights, and appropriate accommodations than other students and that students gained increased self-confidence and the ability to advocate for themselves” (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, Johnson, & Stillerman, 2002). All team members share in the responsibility of providing an appropriate education for the student. By extension, all team members are also responsible for compelling the student to take responsibility for his or her own education. Allowing students to be a part of the IEP process not only gives them an opportunity to participate in their education, but it allows them to take initiative and responsibility for their own learning (Stanberry, 2014). The manual provides parents a sense of justification and guidance in order to help them better prepare their children for their IEPS. The manual presents an in depth guideline for parents to follow in order to adequately coach their child to be prepared to lead and/or participate in his or her IEP. Lastly, student led IEPS foster a fundamental union between parent, teacher, and student resulting in an environment for an all-encompassing communication among all IEP team members (CADRE, 2016).

Lessons Learned

The most important lesson the researcher learned in the construction of the manual project was that the development of the manual was a process, which needed to

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be worked on actively in order to meet the needs of individual parents and students. Seeking a starting point, the researcher discovered that parents' knowledge of special education was inconsistent, so providing a short and concise background on special education and the steps involved was necessary before any template could be designed. The author perceived a need to educate parents without discouraging them from being supportive. All of the information involved in the special education process is dense and could potentially be intimidating to parents who are unfamiliar with special education and the IEP process.

The researcher focused on the student skills that would be obtained and positive outcomes of student involvement in his or her IEP. While students develop skills to participate in their IEP meetings, they initiate the development of self-reliance, self-determination, and self-advocacy skills. These skills are then carried with the student throughout his or her academic career and on into the real world.

As the researcher designed the template, the intention was to extract the necessarily extensive and personal information in a way that was student friendly. Asking questions in a way that the student understood was critical to obtaining true and honest answers. The template was created to allow parent and child to converse on a level in which they were equal, yet the information needed to develop an IEP was obtained.

Educational Implications

It is crucial for educators in both general and special education to comprehend the importance of students being incorporated in their IEPs. The skills that students develop and master, such as self-advocacy, self-knowledge, and self-determination, are

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foundational skills that students will incorporate in their learning as well as life outside of academics. Best practices for student led IEPs are as simple as engaging the student in his or her IEP. The researcher cannot emphasize enough the importance of supporting active participation throughout the unfolding of the IEP process and encouraging students to take on a leadership role.

Project Implementation Plans

The researcher hopes to pilot the utilization of the manual by holding workshops for parents to attend. The intention is that other Ed Specialists will recognize the significance of the manual in practice and choose to participate in the implementation and promotion of the methods it contains.

Any supplemental assistance in managing the IEP process is beneficial to families as well as the educators. This is particularly true of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The researcher hopes the manual will serve to be readily usable for parents and help to emphasize to them that a student's participation in his or other IEP is crucial for the development of life long skills such as self-determination and self-advocacy.

Limitations of Project

In the design of the project, the researcher included the parents under the assumption that they were English speaking and were not strangers to the Special Education program. Although the manual provided a brief background and introduction to Special Education and detailed explanations of an IEP, the researcher is aware that many parents are new to the program, as well as non-English speaking. The researcher

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would like to have an option for parents to purchase the manual in the family's preferred language.

Future Research or Project Suggestions

The researcher strongly believes that the skills learned and relationships built during the IEP process can translate into developing conscientious and confident individuals. There are many positive outcomes that can be achieved in practicing student led IEPs. The researcher has many ideas and future intentions of promoting more support for student involvement in student led IEPs.

Summary/Conclusion

The manual, "Preparing for Student Led IEPs", was truly designed to be an encouraging, tangible resource for parents to properly prepare and connect with their child. Parents are the first and most significant teacher to their children. If the bond between parent and child is strong, the attitude and involvement of the child in school is inevitably excellent. The manual provides a template for parents to review with their child and allows the parent to explain the IEP process in laymen's terms that the child can comprehend. This is the first step in engaging the child in the process.

In closing, the manual, "Preparing for Student Led IEPs", is designed, not only to encourage and provide parents the tools to better support their child in his or her IEP process, but also to bridge the gap between school and home. If the inconsistencies in responsibility, self-advocacy and self-determination between home and school can become consistent in the lives of students, then success can be more certain.

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