

Success One Student at a Time: What the IEP team does! **Rachel Quenemoen**

Over the past 20 years, NCEO has provided technical assistance to many states on their inclusive assessment and accountability systems. In that process, discussions inevitably arise about what the “general curriculum” really means in IDEA, and what IEP teams can do to ensure that each student has the services, supports, and specialized instruction they need to achieve proficiency on the goals and standards defined by the state for all students. This tool about “what the IEP team does” is the product of those discussions. Since 2000, this tool has evolved with feedback from special education and general education teachers, administrators, and state-level staff, and will continue evolving over the next many years as we continue to learn more about how to ensure success for every student, one student at a time.

The origins of this tool came from a provocative article in the *Journal of Special Education Leadership* where Maggie McLaughlin asked the question in the title, “Access to the general education curriculum: Paperwork and procedure or reinventing special education?” (McLaughlin, 1999). She cited a survey of teachers of both general and special educators that found:

- Many teachers did not understand the meaning of “curriculum” – and many speculated that curriculum meant lesson plans, units, or textbooks.
- Teachers reported that scope and sequence of the curriculum was not typically considered in IEP planning.
- Teachers noted that the new (at that time) subject matter standards and curricular frameworks were very challenging in terms of numbers of skills and concepts as well as in their complexity.
- Teachers commented on competing priorities, specifying concerns about whether to move forward on content or remediate past content not as yet mastered; how to set priorities on some content over other content; and concerns about how these decisions in a given school year affect opportunities in the future.

McLaughlin identified complicating factors, including:

- Teachers reported professional orientations that were in conflict, with some concerned about functional skills instruction instead of teaching of academics.
- Developmental perspectives seemed to emerge as well, with a sense that students needed to be ready to move up a sequence, and instruction in higher content was precluded if lower skills were not in place.
- Teachers reported that finding time for learning strategy instruction and supports while the student was progressing in the general curriculum was a challenge; similarly, teachers reported difficulty in accommodating learning in more challenging content when students are still building basic skills.

The solutions that McLaughlin identified to ensure that special education practices reflect true standards-based reform instead of paperwork included the necessity of more collaboration of general and special education; need for time and resources to build joint understanding of what the general curriculum is and an understanding that not all skills and knowledge are equal in implementation; and training on instructional accommodations and differentiated instruction so

that students can move forward in the content while receiving intensive instruction on targeted prerequisite skills.

She proposed what she considered to be a best practice collaborative planning process, involving parents, students, teacher. This process included four steps:

1. Define critical knowledge and performance expectations in general curriculum;
2. Identify aids, supports, services necessary;
3. Reflect longitudinal view of learning;
4. Integrate and align content and instruction. (McLaughlin, 1999)

Application of the McLaughlin article to IEP planning:

This tool for IEP teams is meant to operationalize McLaughlin's proposal, based on discussions over almost a decade with educators from across the country. A key consideration in this tool is the realization that although the IEP team plans for success for one student at a time, success for any student cannot be achieved in isolation from the fully, inclusive, standards-based system at the school and district level. That is, if the opportunities at the school and district level (e.g., highly skilled teachers instructing in the content areas, regardless of instructional setting) are not matched to the student's strengths and needs, then the IEP team has limited capacity to intervene successfully.

Thus, this planning tool has two columns for action – the first column defines the role of the school and district in providing key information and resources; the second column defines the role of the IEP team in identifying the services, supports, and specialized instruction needed for this student to be successful. In this process, each IEP team must count on the full support and participation of someone representing the school/district in ways that guarantee system resources will be in place to support the student's success.

McLaughlin, M.J. (1999). Access to the general education curriculum: Paperwork and procedure or redefining special education. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 12(1), 9-14.

A standards-based planning tool for IEP teams

SYSTEM OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES – representatives from school and district must provide this information and support	STUDENT STRENGTHS AND NEEDS – IEP team grapples with data-based decision-making to identify services, supports, and specialized instruction so that the student will be successful
1. What is the required content in the next grade level?	1. What are the student’s current strengths and needs in the academic content areas? What data do we have to make that determination? What accelerated or remedial services and supports are necessary to ensure success in the content for the next grade level?
2. Where and when during the school year is the required content taught in Math? ELA? Science? Social Studies? Other? How is it taught?	2. What adaptations and accommodations can the student use to access the grade level content regardless of specific deficit basic skills in reading or mathematics or English language? What data do we have to support these choices? How will we determine if their use is effective or needs changing?
3. What instructional and curricular options are currently available in this school to allow all students to achieve proficiency in the goals and standards set for all students?	3. What specific instructional strategies work well for this student? What types of curricular materials work well for this student? If the needs of this student and the options available don’t align well, what aids, services, supports, and instruction does the student need to be successful in spite of gaps? How can the current options be changed?
4. What array of services does the school provide to meet the students’ other needs?	4. What specific nonacademic needs does this student have? What goals and objectives will address those needs? How do these relate to the student’s academic success?
5. What is the curricular map into the future, what are essential understandings every student needs to achieve this year?	5. How can we set priorities to ensure the essential understandings are mastered by this student, but still allow the TIME the school and the student needs to address all needs.
6. How does all this go together, with professional development, support, continuous improvement, community linkages . . . so that ALL children are successful?	6. How do we align curriculum, instruction, supports, services, and needs so that THIS child is successful at grade level?

Capture notes as you go on the following topics to ensure you identify opportunities and barriers that require system support to ensure success.

- 1. Specific opportunities for this student, this team**
- 2. Specific potential barriers for this student, this team**
- 3. What specifically will empower the members of this team to plan for and carry out effective educational programming to ensure every child learns to grade level expectations? e.g., structural support, training, materials, time**

Once you have answered these questions in the table above, use your local planning forms to develop the plan.