

Advocacy for Students with Autism in Schools

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A few statistics

- Center for Disease Control estimates that 1 in 50 children has autism. (up 23% from data collected in 2007).
- Access to early screening and services results in life time costs being reduced by as much as two-thirds.
- Mandated services provided through IDEA end upon completion of high school or age 22.

School Based Services begin at age 3

- Access to services at the appropriate levels is often dependent on parent's and professionals advocacy on behalf of the child.
- Recommendations and referrals to appropriate professionals is critical.
- Schools look to these professionals for guidance on what is needed.

The Legal Framework

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and corresponding state law Americans with Disabilities Act

What do these laws require:

Access to a free , appropriate, education in the least restrictive environment.

Education must confer benefit.



Evaluations

- The development of a good educational plan starts with good data and comprehensive information.
- Multi-disciplinary team
- Evaluation should cover all areas of concern.
- By law must be done every three years.

Team approach

- Parents are key members of the team but not necessarily the only decision makers.
- Collaborative approach is best with full disclosure of information on all sides.



Development of the IEP

- Starts with accurate data. (present levels of performance).
- The entire IEP should be data driven.
- Objective measurements of progress/
- Parents should feel free to ask for a meeting if the data indicates there is no progress.
- IEP's aren't limited to one time per year.

Preparing for the IEP

- Provide evaluations in advance (for both the parents and the school)
- Develop an Agenda (share it with the district)
- Agree on how much time you need
- Avoid marathon IEP meetings



Prioritize

- Agree on the priority of needs.
- Determine what must happen this year.
- What can the school accomplish and what must happen outside of school.



IEP Goals

- Objective
- Measureable
- Data Driven
- Baseline testing and findings on subsequent administrations of the same test can demonstrate whether the child is progressing and receiving educational benefit.

IEP Goals

- It is always helpful to have DRAFT goals in advance of the meeting.
- Practice Tip: If you need time to think about the goals that were prepared after the meeting ask for additional time to review the goals. Be reasonable.



Example

- _____ will develop social understanding skills as measured by the benchmarks listed below:
- The goal should first state the Present Level of Performance(PLOP).
- Identify what will be measured-
 - Will engage in cooperative play interactions initiated by others given 4/5 opportunities to do so.

Example (continued)

- As an educator I should know the following information:
- How often the goal will be measured?
- Who will take the data?
- Who will provide the services in order to allow my child to learn this skill?
- How often will I get the information regarding progress on the goal?

Goals are the blue print for the educational plan

- Common Core Standards are not meant as mere window dressing. Must be able to articulate what you are doing.
- They are meaningful.
- Including a number in the benchmark doesn't make them measurable.

Behavioral Intervention Plans

- Start with a functional behavioral analysis(FBA).
- Develop a behavior plan based on the data.
- Positive behavioral interventions are required.
- Should be a working document not one that is simply put in a file. If it isn't working it needs to be revisited.

Behavior

- Behavior can significantly impact academics.
- Resolving behavioral issues is a priority since that can impact the student's access to the general education curriculum and inclusion options.



Remain Calm



Interventions and Methodology

- IDEA 2004 requires that schools utilize scientific research based interventions to the extent practicable. (34 CFR § 300.35)
- Scientifically based research includes the requirement that a peer-reviewed journal published the research or that experts evaluated the intervention through rigorous, objective, scientific review that approved its effectiveness.

Methodology

- Schools aren't required to use a specific methodology even if parent's request this intervention.
- Schools are required to articulate what they plan to do and why this will be effective for the student.



Extended School Year

- There is no single reason for determining whether a student qualifies for ESY.
- The answer from a school system that states this is all we have is not a legal answer. ESY must be individualized as well.
- Goal of ESY is on maintenance of skills.



Objective Data

- The decision on ESY is data driven.
- One question the IEP team asks is will recoupment take more than 9 weeks once a student returns to school during the school year.
- Schools must consider the severity of the child's disability in determining ESY eligibility.

Related Services

- Related services are transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education. (e.g. speech, OT, social work).
- Related services are required to be individualized rather than determined by a disability category or the availability of staff.

Related Services (cont).

- A one to one assistant is a related service.
- Direct Service is delivered to the student. It doesn't mean it is 1:1.
- Changes in the amount and type of related services can't be made without an IEP meeting. (parents and school can agree in writing to change)

A few tips

- If students are complicated the following are suggestions for keeping up with what is going on outside of the annual IEP meeting.
 - Weekly e-mail.
 - Team meetings (frequency is determined by needs and the team).
 - Consultation with an outside professional if things aren't working.

Communication Tips

- Note your concerns in writing.
- This should be brief and not a multi-page e-mail or letter criticizing the staff.
- If there are serious concerns- pick up the phone. Don't let things get to a crisis point.

Transition Services

- Should begin at age 14.5 in Illinois. This may happen sooner.
- Students are eligible until age 22.
- This is the whole point of special education.



Transition Services

- The term transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that –
 - (A) Is designed to be a results oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the movement from school to post-school activities, including

Transition Services (cont)

- (B) is based upon the individual child's needs, taking into the account the child's strengths, preferences and interests;

Transition

- (C) Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other-post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

Researched Based Interventions

- Resources

- National Autism Center

- www.nationalautismcenter

- Autism Society www.autism-society.org

- Autism Spectrum Disorders: Guide to Evidence Based Interventions

- www.autismguidelines.dmh.mo.gov

- www.wrightslaw.com

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