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Focus

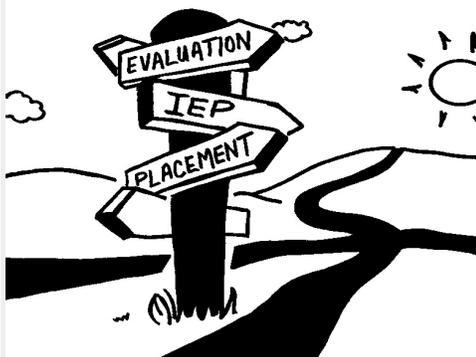
*A newsletter for the employees of
the East Central Kansas
Cooperative in Education*



August 2019

National Back to School
Month

Volume 4 Issue 1



Building a Better IEP to Benefit Our Students

I remember as a young special education teacher I thought that the transition from general education English to a significant support needs classroom would present some challenges, but that being a teacher is being a teacher no matter what the level. I soon learned that while there was some teaching that occurs at a far more intense level, the preparatories for those classes were not at all like those for a general education class. I quickly learned that being a special education teacher has as much to do with being a manager as it does with being a teacher in the conventional sense.

In addition to building schedules for each individual student to be able to schedule the address of each of their IEP goals, managing the schedules of paraprofessionals to support those students and teaching individual lessons that address more significant deficits, the paperwork associated with maintaining compliance with individual student progress replaced the traditional preparation for a standardized curricular offering in the general education classroom. Each of you as special education providers has at some point lamented the bane of our existence—the dreaded paperwork associated with special education.



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Frequently (Recently) Asked Questions

Every month I will include questions that you have asked - others probably need the answers

Q: We have a student with an outside therapist who is recommending that the student be allowed to have a shortened school day. What is our obligation to provide that?

A: You should always write the IEP based upon a full day offering, because that is what every child is entitled to. We don't necessarily have to follow the guidance of an outside therapist or even a physician for that matter, but we consider it through the lens of the educational programming. Occasionally the team will agree that it is in the child's best interest to have the shortened day. It's then really up to the individual building administration to pursue or ignore truancy action based upon the decision of the parents to provide the student for the full day offering. There have been cases where we did allow it on a temporary basis due to school phobia or severe medical conditions, but there has always been a plan for gradually bringing the student into full attendance. And of course the prior written notice would always be sent letting the parents know that the school stands ready willing and able to provide the full FAPE offering per the IEP written for such, when the parents make the child available.

But the IEP team never recommends a shortened day due to the fact that the student with a disability is always afforded a full day offering, with the accommodations that we can put in place that would allow the student access to the general curriculum. Plan for the student to attend full days and identify a plan for that student to reach that goal in the event that the team and administration agree that part-time is appropriate in the short-term.

Q: Can our paras work with us on the work days that we have before school starts?

A: Paraprofessionals are paid and reimbursed to be here only when students are present, so for the most part, their work schedules are limited to school days where the students are here. There are a few exceptions that are usually granted when circumstances warrant. At the beginning of the school year can be one of those exceptions, but only on a limited basis. We typically grant a half day for paras before the school year starts to help teachers get organized, so that's the standard. Any circumstances that might warrant additional para time need to be taken up with the director and we can consider them on a case by case basis. I hope the preparation for the school year goes well and I hope you and your paras have a great school year!



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But rather than look at the paperwork as a necessary evil, this year I am asking that we shift our paradigm. Yes, the IEP is a legal document that must be completed correctly to ensure defensibility in the focus on student progress. But it is far more than just a requirement. The IEP should be the sun that all of the other facets of our teaching responsibilities revolve around. And as important as the IEP is, our focus this year will be on making certain they are written correctly and thoroughly.

Beginning in October, one or more of each service providers IEPs will be sampled for accountability to an IEP checklist that will be introduced at our kickoff in-service on August 8. The percentage of compliance on the checklist will be used as a baseline for determining areas of focus for improvement in Interlocal-wide consistency in IEP writing. While the focus of most of these types of accountability checklists is to *quantify* the percentage of compliance on the basic components of the IEP itself, it is more difficult to *qualify* the contents of the IEP for efficacy and appropriateness. However, the checklist that will be presented will attempt to do both. It will be a work in progress, as I would like feedback from each of you on how to make this tool more functional for you in your daily work of crafting the IEP. Together I believe that we can come up with a product that will not only make your jobs a little easier but will also result in the IEP that will give each of our students the opportunity to demonstrate the targeted skills that they need to be successful, and equally as important, to provide measurable data that proves the growth at a glance to all interested parties.

There will be the tendency for some of you who have been doing this for a while to think that this may be an unnecessary process and one that is a redundant waste of time. On the contrary, an exercise in reflecting on the quality of the work that you do is always an opportunity for improvement and one that I hope that you welcome. In an era of scrutiny of the public education system as a whole, constant efforts are being made to find ways to demonstrate accountability in terms that everyone can understand. I believe that this checklist gives us that opportunity and that using the data that we gather from this process will provide us with a the baseline we need for greater consistency and ultimately better outcomes for the students we serve.

One additional outcome of this process to improve the IEP itself is that it is designed to bring the IEP into focus as more than a perfunctory document that is seen once a year and then not opened until it is time to review it for the next obligatory meeting. The IEP is and should be a living document that guides the ancillary instructional support that each student has been determined to need, both in and out of the general education classroom. By putting additional focus on how comprehensive the IEPs that we craft can be, it keeps the document that guides that instruction in the center of the teaching role. If we can approach this critical process as the professional development opportunity that it is designed to be, we can each feel good about the improvement that it can bring, both for us as professionals and for the students we serve.



DOs & DON'Ts

Here are things to consider when focusing on improving IEP development

DO always look for ways to improve your craft as a teacher, even if the process is obligatory and seemingly mundane.

DO consider that your students' progress depends on a thoughtful, deliberate approach that has to consider each student's unique circumstances and needs

DON'T respond negatively to the process of scrutinizing your own IEPs by thinking it is just one more thing to do. This process will help you grow as a professional

DON'T miss the opportunity to find new ways to address your students needs by making certain every IEP you write meets the quality standards that this process will ultimately highlight

New Behavior Specialist to Serve All Schools

We are happy to welcome Andrea Reece to the ECKCE team as our new behavior specialist. Her experience as a social worker will be invaluable in supporting students with behavior, academic, and emotional needs. She believes that improving behavior requires data-based decision making, measurable outcomes, evidence-based practices, and a commitment to student success while working as a team. She looks forward to supporting all of our districts. Her role will include attending monthly school meetings, participating in the WEBS referral team, coaching individual teachers, leading professional development, collaborating with service providers, and participating in the development of BIPs for students who need them. She's a problem-solver and strong believer in true collaboration for student growth and success. Let's welcome her to the team!

Back to School Certified In-Service August 8

Well, it was hot while it lasted. I hope all of you had a great summer and are eager and refreshed to begin the new year right! We will gather at the Baldwin Intermediate Center on Thursday August 8 @ 8:00 with a light breakfast provided by the 614 NEA. We have a lot of introductions and trainings to complete, but we should wrap those by around 12:00, followed by a brief association meeting, and lunch provided by the Kansas State Bank. After lunch we'll have a mini-IEP Bootcamp and rollout of the new IEP checklist. See you all then!

Para Corner

Please share this newsletter with your paras, just in case they did not receive it via email. If you have questions about paras as a group, don't hesitate to now contact Shelly McCart @ smccart@eckce.com.

Back to School Paraeducator In-service August 13

For all of you who are returning this fall, welcome back! For those of you who are new, welcome aboard! Regardless, I hope you had a great summer and are refreshed and eager to start another great school year helping our students with all the things they need to succeed!

Paraeducator In-Service training will take place on August 13 from 8:00 until 3:30 with lunch on your own. A light breakfast will be served and we will start various mandatory trainings at 8:30. We will go over a variety of topics related to your job duties, administer some mandatory trainings and will have folks from the office available for questions on benefits and everything else you might need at that time. We will also go over the paraprofessional handbook and any questions that you may have about your current work agreement including levels and differentiated pay.

There have been some questions as to the individual district trainings that your buildings may be requiring you to attend. If you have checked with your building and they would like you to attend those trainings, please just clock in and out and you will be paid for those hours as well as the four hours allotted for working in your classrooms. Welcome back!!!