

Key Component – Give Youth an Opportunity to Get Involved



HOW THIS CAN WORK— SARAH'S TRANSITION PLANNING STORY

“Why is everyone pushing me to go to my IEP meetings?” asked Sarah. Thinking she had all the answers, her case manager replied, “Well, because it’s YOUR IEP”. “Well,” Sarah said, “it’s ALWAYS been my IEP, so why is it so important that I be there now?” The case manager thought for a moment. The reality was that the team was inviting Sarah because the law said they had to invite her. “Here I am saying it is all about her,” thought the case manager, “but she’s right. It has always been about her”. “How come I’ve never been invited before? I could have told you that some of the stuff wouldn’t work if somebody asked me,” Sarah said. The case manager decided to be honest and told Sarah, “We were never required to think about involving you before now”.



Important Details!

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

It is required that youth with disabilities be invited to their IEP meetings whenever transition is being discussed. If the youth does not attend the meeting, the IEP team must include the youth’s strengths, interests and preferences when creating the transition plan.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

While it is required that youth be invited, there is no requirement that the youth attend the IEP meeting and no law explains how a youth’s interests or preferences should be obtained. Also, if a youth does attend, nothing ever spells out what the youth’s role is at the meeting or how teams should involve them. It is just assumed that since it is now about what they want to do after high school that youth will want to jump right in and take ownership of their IEP. Strategies for self-advocacy, rights and responsibilities, and how to participate appropriately have usually not been discussed with youth, so how can we expect them to know how to participate?

How can you encourage youth participation?

- **Begin early.** Many youth find it is difficult to start being involved when they are in high school because by then they may have developed negative feelings about special education. Find ways to involve them earlier.
- **Help them prepare** - Teach about the special education and transition process. Youth also need to know about their IEP and its purpose. Youth often report feeling frustrated by being invited to an IEP meeting and not know what is going on. They need to be taught the “lingo” and vocabulary and effective communication strategies.
- **Self-awareness** - Youth need to have an awareness and understanding of their disability, learning styles, strengths and needs.
- **Give them the skills** - Youth need to be taught self-advocacy and communication skills.
- **Provide opportunities for involvement**- Youth need multiple ways to be involved and have options beyond just attending an IEP meeting. Not all youth will go to a meeting. Their lack of willingness to attend does not mean they do not have anything important to say. Some youth have simply never been asked to attend a meeting in a way they understood or felt their input was truly wanted. From a youth’s perspective, the focus of IEP meetings is on filling out the IEP and not listening to what they have to say. To youth, it seems that piece of paper is running the meeting.



Transition Planning Tips!!

- **Key Component – Make a Plan** has resources on tools and models for developing a plan that can be used with youth and then translated into the IEP.
- Kids As Self-Advocates www.fvkasa.org has a great deal of fact sheets and other information written by youth with disabilities for youth with disabilities that can be helpful.
- Youthhood www.youthhood.org also has information and tools written by youth with disabilities for youth with disabilities that can help kids learn about the special education process and life after high school. They also have a section for parents and teachers.

There are different levels to youth involvement and ways that a youth can participate in their IEP and transition planning.

Giving Input –

Participation and involvement doesn't necessarily mean attendance. In some cases, a youth attending an IEP meeting may not be appropriate. In other cases, the parents may not wish to have their child be in attendance. And sometimes the youth themselves may just flat out refuse to attend. Regardless, they have important information to share with the team. Schools have many strategies to gain input, but here are a few more.

- Complete interest inventories or future planning activity. See **Key Component – Thinking about the Future** for more information and tools.
- Give a written or taped statement for their IEP meeting
- Write their post-secondary goals
- Write their present levels or description of themselves

Attending and participating in the IEP meeting –

Just like there are many ways to be involved, there are many ways to participate in an IEP meeting. Regardless of how they participate in the meeting, youth need pre-teaching about the process, terms and roles in the special education process. No one will argue that youth and adults speak a different language, but there is a whole other language to special education. Youth need to understand that IEP teams will likely take their words and turn them into "IEP language," but that does not mean their input is not worthy or any less meaningful. It simply is just re-wording it into "IEP and adult speak." Other strategies to support youth in an IEP meeting include:

- Begin gradually, with structured activities or purposes for their participation such as using one of the activities described in **Key Components Thinking about the Future and Making a Plan**.
- Create a presentation (oral, written, making a drawing or poster, or a Powerpoint presentation) for the IEP meeting
- Invite the youth to present their ideas and then let the IEP team discuss the details. The youth can then review the IEP, ask questions out side of the meeting and have another meeting to discuss and finalize
- Define roles and set ground rules. Encourage the youth to set some of the ground rules such as no abbreviations/acronyms
- Actively engage youth in conversation by asking questions that youth "know the answers to". Go over questions ahead of time
- Encourage youth to invite others to their IEP meeting
- Ask the youth to create the agenda or add to one that you create



Transition Planning Tips!!

There are several models, curriculums and guides to Youth/Self Directed IEPs. Many are very detailed but parents can use parts to help teach their youth about the special education and IEP process and to support their participation.

- o The National Dissemination Center for Children With Disabilities (NICHCY) has a guide for youth about developing their IEPs. www.nichcy.org/stugui/asp They also have workshops, resources and other information on transition and IEPs for parents.
- o www.studentledieps.org is designed for youth and has a variety of youth oriented tools and strategies to help you become involved in the IEP process. It's based from Arizona, however the tools and strategies can be used by anyone living in any state.
- o See PIC's website www.picnh.org for more ideas for self-directed and youth driven IEPs.



HOW THIS CAN WORK— SARAH'S TRANSITION PLANNING STORY

Sarah's case manager understands why she does not want to go to her IEP meetings, but she also knows how important her input is in a transition plan. So, Sarah and her case manager decided to meet over the next few weeks and put together a transition plan using the MAPS model. She brought it home and shared it with her parents. She and her parents worked on it some more and then she brought it back to her case manager. Then her case manager helped Sarah write out what she wanted for her post-secondary measurable goals. At the IEP meeting, Sarah's case manager had copies of her post-secondary goals for each team member and put up her future's plan on the walls all around the room. The IEP team came up with a transition plan that included all the required components in her IEP. Both Sarah's case manager and her parents went over the IEP with her a few days later.



Transition Planning Tips!!

- o Advocating Change Together (ACT) is a grassroots disability rights organization run by and for people with developmental and other disabilities. ACT's mission is to help people across disabilities to see themselves as part of a larger disability rights movement and make connections to other civil and human rights struggles
www.selfadvocacy.org
- o Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) works to ensure that people with disabilities are treated as equals and that they are given the same decisions, choices, rights, responsibilities, and chances to speak up to empower themselves; opportunities to make new friends; and to learn from their mistakes. www.sabeusa.org
- o Kids As Self Advocates www.fvkasa.org has a great deal of information written by youth with disabilities for youth designed to help youth become self-advocates.
- o People First of New Hampshire is a non-profit organization directed by people with disabilities for the purpose of self-advocacy. They have information on NH self-advocacy groups and forums.
www.peoplefirstofnh.org
- o The Postsecondary Innovative Transition Technology Project (Post-ITT) provides resources and training for high school students with disabilities who are considering college. They have a parent section that includes activities and training materials to assist parents in developing self-advocacy skills in their children.
<http://www.postitt.org/parentcourse/index.shtml>