



DIRECTIONS

Technology in Special Education

Vol. 8 , No. 1

September 2001

Getting the “Big Picture” of IEP Goals and State Standards

By James M. Walsh

Source: TEACHING Exceptional Children, May/June 2001

What effect is the standards reform movement having on the education and classroom placement of students with disabilities? Are we able to meet the requirement to educate these students in the least restrictive environment? Are we able to include such students in general education curriculum, instruction, and assessment? What can districts do to ensure the success of their students with disabilities in a climate of higher expectations and high-stakes assessments?

With the guidance provided by research findings, the Anne Arundel County (Maryland) Public Schools initiated a staff development program to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. This program guides educators through an improved IEP process that provides a better alignment of IEP goals with general education curricular outcomes. This article describes this program and teachers' responses to it during the 1999-2000 school year.

Staff Development on the General Education Curriculum

The district planned a staff development program to assist special education teachers in aligning IEPs with general education curriculums. A major strategy of this program was to ground the training in general education school improvement planning and to involve general education teachers in the planning stages of this effort. The rationale for this strategy was based not only in recognition of the historic absence of a coherent knowledge of general education curriculum among special educators (Pugach & Warger, 1993), but also to ensure wide acceptance and implementation of training practices and materials. In addition, the district wanted to provide curricular materials and procedures that could facilitate and expedite the IEP development process for teachers with limited IEP planning time.

An initial issue to resolve for teachers expected to align IEP goals with general education curriculum was to identify and explain to them what was



Inside

- | | |
|--|----------|
| HalfthePlanet News | 6 |
| A solution to bridging the distance in AT Education | 7 |

meant by “curriculum” (McLaughlin, 1999). In practical terms, how can a special education teacher at the high school level align the IEP of a 9th grade student reading at the 5th grade level with the general education curriculum when the reading curriculum for the 5th-8th grades is not accessible to this teacher? How can this teacher develop instructional goals for this student in the reading area without guidance from a scope and sequence of reading skills contained in the general education curriculum? In Maryland, we found the solution to this problem in the recently approved state content standards, which provide a *K-12* curricular framework with specific goals and indicators delineated at grades 3, 5, 8, and 12. Our first staff development task, therefore, was to ensure that these content standards were readily available to special education teachers in all schools. Accordingly, we developed an IEP Alignment binder for teachers that became the central medium and message of the staff development training entitled “Aligning Student IEPs with Maryland Curricular Standards: A Tool for IEP Development.”

Included in the IEP alignment binder were the Maryland Content Standards for English, Math, Social Studies, and Science, as well as student outcomes for Maryland’s alternative assessment program (Independence Mastery Assessment Program, IMAP), and detailed directions and examples to develop IEP goals aligned with general education curriculum. The district provided a staff development program (3 hours) for more than 600 special education and related services staff. The program was planned by a

committee of teachers from both special education and general education with the purpose of accelerating student achievement using the IEP planning process. The introduction to the IEP alignment binder recognized that, “for too long, teachers have provided instruction based solely on where students with disabilities are currently functioning, not on where they need to go.”

Rationale for Aligning IEPs with Curricular Standards

We began the staff development program with a brief overview of the new IEP provisions of IDEA 1997—particularly the requirements for access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities and the need to involve general education teachers in the IEP process. In an effort to positively affect the beliefs of participants, we provided an overview of the rationale for the special education policy changes with reference to the extensive research demonstrating that students with disabilities benefit when access to general education curriculum is maximized and high expectations are maintained.

The overview also addressed the need for special education teachers involved in the IEP alignment training to understand the overall context and genesis of the standards-reform movement and its effect on general education. The district emphasized research findings that suggest a correlation between the intensity of curriculum and student achievement (McDonnell, et al., 1997). The trainers pointed out that both special and general educational research has supported the involvement of students

DIRECTIONS

Technology in Special Education

ISSN: 1079-607X

Publisher & Editor in Chief

Janet P. Hosmer

Editor

Kathy S. Knight

Technical Editor

Chester D. Hosmer, Jr.

Regular Contributors

Lorianne Hoenninger

Susan Lait

DREAMMS FOR KIDS, INC.

273 Ringwood Road
Freeville, NY 13068-5606
VOICE: 607.539.3027
FAX: 607.539.9930

Greetings@dreamms.org
www.dreamms.org

DIRECTIONS: Technology in Special Education is published 11 times per year by DREAMMS for Kids, Inc., (Developmental Research for the Effective Advancement of Memory and Motor Skills), a non-profit service agency and AT information clearinghouse. Annual home delivery subscription rate is \$14.95 U.S., \$17.95 Canadian, and \$29.95 Int'l. (U.S.\$). Single copies are available in the U.S. for \$2.50. Add \$1.00 for postage outside U.S.

Authors - We welcome editorial submissions. Please include name, address and phone. Submission will be returned with self addressed stamped envelope, if desired.

Vendors - We welcome product news. Please include pricing and contact name with press releases.

Copyright © 2001 by DREAMMS for Kids, Inc. Permission to reprint all or part of this publication with acknowledgment to *DIRECTIONS: Technology in Special Education*, and DREAMMS for Kids, is granted. Articles are presented for information purposes only — no product endorsement is expressed or implied.

with disabilities in high curricular standards.

We then introduced the process of aligning IEPs to curricular standards as a means of comparing a student's current level of performance to the expectations for peers without disabilities of the same age group, identifying the skills needed for successful involvement in the general education curriculum, and ensuring that teachers teach the content that is measured on standard-based assessments. We stressed the importance of linking the IEP needs of students with daily classroom lesson planning and instruction.

Alignment Process

Surveys of special education teachers (Sands, Adams, & Stout, 1995) have revealed that, in the absence of curriculum to provide direction for special educators, "instructional decision making and practices are often haphazard and widely divergent" (p. 69). Therefore, we emphasized that the alignment process must begin with collaboration with general education teachers regarding the instruction needed to enable students with disabilities to meet curriculum standards. Indeed, the most critical decision made by special and general education teachers regarding the instruction of students with disabilities may be what is *not* necessary for all students to learn to meet high content standards. Rather, we need to be asking what are the essential skills needed "for adequate performance on a curriculum standard and which are optional" (McLaughlin, Nolet, Rhim, & Henderson, 1999, p. 70).

critical decisions, particularly in determining the impact of a student's performance levels on his or her ability to successfully achieve general education curricular outcomes, we developed a "curriculum alignment organizer" adapted from earlier efforts of the Aurora, Colorado, Public Schools (Fognani-Smaus, 1999). The curriculum alignment organizer (see Figure 1) consists of a worksheet that lists the content standards in each of the major content areas with columns in which the teacher can check how a student will meet the standard:

*In the same way as a student without disabilities (the column marked "G", for "general standard").

*With accommodations (GA, or "general standard, with accommodations").

*Through a modified standard (M).

*Through an alternate standard (IMAP, or Independence Mastery Assessment Program).

If the teacher chooses a modified standard, he or she references the content standards within the IEP alignment resource book to note the particular indicators that align with the student's level of functioning. These indicators from the K-12 scope and sequence would then serve as the source of the IEP objectives for that student. If the student could meet the standard with accommodations, the teacher noted the accommodation on the worksheet for inclusion in the IEP. Students with disabilities working toward alternative curricular goals would have IEPs referenced to Maryland's IMAP.

Providing access to the general

education curriculum for students with disabilities begins with orienting special education teachers to this curriculum and improving their understanding of it (McLaughlin, 1999). Special education teachers must be able to interact and communicate with general education teachers about the curriculum. The curriculum alignment organizer (Figure 1) can serve as an index and guide for special education teachers to learn and access the general education curricular outcomes as they relate to the individual needs of students with disabilities. It also provides a common language to facilitate the critical collaboration and decision making that must occur over time among IEP team members.

Along with introducing the curriculum alignment organizer and providing training activities for participants to practice its usefulness in accessing the general education curricula, the staff development program also reviewed the difference between an *accommodation* and a *modification* for a student with disabilities.

*An accommodation is a change in *how* a student accesses and demonstrates learning, but it does not substantially change the instructional content.

*A modification is a change in *what* a student is expected to learn and demonstrate.

The difference is critical in light of the high-stakes assessments, which may affect a student's ability to receive a high school diploma. That is, teachers who decide to reduce or limit the instruction to students with disabilities through an IEP *modification* must be aware of the essential learning that students need for successful participation in state and district assessment programs (Green, & Sireci, 1999).

To assist IEP teams in making these

Our training program also emphasized that part of the alignment process is providing materials or strategies (e.g., the use of a scientific calculator, a memory strategy) that students may need to access the general education curriculum.

Linking IEPs with Instructional Planning

In recognition of the historical inadequacies of the IEP as a guide for classroom instruction (Smith, 1990), the second major goal of the staff development program was to provide strategies and materials to enable special education teachers to link IEPs with the instructional planning and to better communicate student needs with general education teachers. To assist teachers plan lessons based on a summary of the IEP needs of students and to make instructional grouping decisions based on students' diverse learning needs, we provided participants with a chart used to identify the "big picture" of common instructional needs of a group of students with disabilities. We used this chart as an activity to engage participants in the practice of instructional decision making. We recommended using the "big picture" matrix (Figure 2) as a way to provide a visual summary of the instructional needs of a class of students. This matrix was also a simple means to inform and involve general education teachers in this collaborative effort.

A final strategy of the staff development initiative was to promote systemic, long-standing change and reinforce the IEP alignment and instructional planning outcomes. We developed a way to include the alignment process in the school system's lesson planning guidelines. This process encompassed the

classroom observation and teacher rating process (see Figure 3). For example, one of the teacher considerations listed in the "context of learning" section of the district's lesson plan guidelines asked the question, "Have I considered an assessment of student needs prior to the lesson?" In the observation form, we added: "How to address IEP Goals/Objectives within curricula outcomes. ..." Likewise, in another item under "instructional planning," we added: "The lesson plan addresses IEP needs of students in context of the general education curricular outcomes." In this way, teachers and building administrators have the responsibility to consider the IEP planning and implementation process as they guide classroom planning and instruction toward accelerating student achievement.

Assessment of the Staff Development Program

At the conclusion of the 3-hour training, we conducted a survey (60% response rate) of staff development participants (N = 628). The survey results revealed that special education teachers understood the need for aligning student IEPs with general education outcomes (83%) and agreed that this is an important topic for staff development (81%). Moreover, the high level of participant agreement (94%) with the guidance provided by the IEP alignment book appeared to affirm previous endorsements by special educators for a centralized framework that standards provide (McLaughlin, Henderson, & Rhim, 1998). The "assessment anxiety" felt by special education teachers regarding how "some" students may not meet more rigorous standards (McLaughlin et al., 1998), however, was reflected in lower agreement (64%) with the question whether "aligning IEPs with Maryland Content

Standard will benefit students with disabilities with higher levels of achievement."

With regard to materials and strategies provided in the staff training program, participants indicated high levels of agreement with the benefits of the "IEP alignment book" (94%), the "curriculum alignment organizer" (77%), and the "Big Picture" matrix (80%). Moreover, participants indicated high levels of agreement with achievement of the training outcomes relating to being informed and aware of the importance of IDEA regulation changes in the IEP process (88%), and being better able to align IEP goals and objectives with content standards (85%). Less agreement was found with outcomes relating to improved ability to involve general education teachers in the IEPs of students with disabilities (68%). The latter responses appeared to reflect a general concern among special education teachers with both limited planning time and limited instructional time to identify, prioritize, and teach the critical skills needed for successful participation in a more rigorous general education curriculum. The responses of secondary teachers to the training outcome regarding improved ability to involve general education teachers in IEPs (47%) appeared to indicate particular concern with their ability to modify the curriculum standards of high-stakes, content-specific secondary classrooms for students with disabilities.

A second and more long-term assessment of the outcomes of the staff development initiative was implemented as part of the routine classroom observation and teacher rating process. That is, the training outcomes have been imbedded in the countywide lesson planning and classroom observation guidelines with specific expectations that the IEP

needs of students be reflected in daily classroom instruction relative to general education curricular outcomes. Because these expectations for special education teachers were to be observed during the 1999-2000 school year, the district targeted 5 of the 47 items on the classroom observation form (see Figure 3) as representing the lesson-planning expectations of the IEP alignment staff training initiative. As Coordinator of Special Education during the 1999-2000 school year, I collected teacher-performance data on these items from more than 80 special education teacher observations (N = 83). I reported the results as an assessment of teacher compliance with instructional planning based on IEP alignment with general education curriculum outcomes.

The first item on the assessment was the provision of a "comprehensive lesson plan and supporting materials." We found a high rate of compliance with this item (95%). Likewise, in light of long-standing county lesson plan guidelines and administrative requirements for posted student outcomes and daily assessment procedures, the second and third items were also highly compliant; that is, planning was based on "Maryland Student Performance Program outcomes and indicators" (88%), and the lesson plan included "an appropriate assessment of the attainment of student outcomes" (88%). We found much less compliance with two final items: Only 59% of the observed classrooms included methods for the appropriate grouping of students and in just 72% of the lesson plans did teachers address the "assessed needs of students."

The challenge for special education teachers is to find the instructional time to help students with disabilities learn rigorous content standards while remediating critical skill deficits. For

this to happen, teachers must daily infuse IEP learning objectives into general education curriculum instruction. We must correct the missed opportunities indicated in the classroom observation summaries, either through a lack of consideration of the assessed needs of the students (which a "big picture" would facilitate) or through a lack of skill in planning grouping strategies to address the multiple and different needs of students with disabilities. Indeed, the use of instructional approaches that promote small-group learning and grouping practices to address the diverse learning needs, styles, and pace of students in general is a critical need for most teachers confronted with standards-based reform (McDonnell et al., 1997).

Final Thoughts and Future Plans

The tools that the Anne Arundel educators developed, an "IEP alignment binder," a "curriculum alignment organizer," and a "big picture matrix," were designed to improve the curriculum based decision-making process for special education teachers and enhance the communication and interaction with general education teachers regarding the needs of students with disabilities. They can be easily duplicated and adapted by other school systems in their efforts to align IEPs and classroom instruction with local general education standards.

We were encouraged by surveys of staff training participants that indicated that special education teachers strongly supported the need for IEP alignment with general education curriculum outcomes to ensure that students with disabilities are not left behind in the standards reform movement. We plan to develop further training programs to address the "assessment anxiety" on the part of special education teachers across the United States.

As a result of the training program and observations described in this article,

Anne Arundel County has adapted the special education observation and rating procedures to include the IEP alignment and lesson planning practices recommended by this staff development effort to better assist administrators in their routine supervision and monitoring of special education in their building. In addition, the district is developing further training programs to assist educators in differentiating instruction and in using other small-group strategies to ensure the success of all learners.

TEACHING Exceptional Children is an official journal of the The Council for Exceptional Children and is published six times a year. Membership to CEC includes TEACHING Exceptional Children, CEC Today, and Exceptional Children, the premier special education journal. As a CEC member you also receive networking opportunities, continuing education opportunities, and numerous benefits relating to your students and professional growth. Contact CEC at 1-888-CEC-SPED or stop in at www.cec.sped.org for more information §

References and figures mentioned in this article can be obtained by contacting Dreamms for Kids, Inc.

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart."

Helen Keller

HalfthePlanet News

LOOK AT WHAT'S NEW THIS MONTH AT HALFTHEPLANET!

Brandon Scott is a middle school student that is writing a new column for HalfthePlanet on his personal experiences. Brandon's second article, "Breaking the Barrier...Having a Disability and Being on the Wrestling Team," is currently featured at HalfthePlanet. The article can be found at http://www.halftheplanet.org/departments/new_content/brandon_scott_wrestling_team.html.

Other recent articles and news at HalfthePlanet include: The Second International Conference on Parents with Disabilities and Their Families will be hosted by Through the Looking Glass (TLG), the U.S. National Resource Center for Parents with Disabilities on October 11-14. Read the full article at http://www.halftheplanet.org/departments/new_content/pwd_conference.html. Jim Dickson and Adina Topfer join American Association of People with Disabilities as vice president, governmental affairs and project director of the Disability Vote Project. Read the full press release at http://www.halftheplanet.org/departments/vote/aapd_hires.html.

Disability Radio Worldwide, the dynamic weekly disability rights radio program makes its Worldwide Web debut. Beginning August 1, 2001, Disability Radio Worldwide can be heard on www.acbradio.org. Read more about Disability Radio Worldwide at http://www.halftheplanet.org/departments/new_content/disability_radio_worldwide.html.

HALFTHEPLANET WELCOMES ITS NEWEST PARTNER

DISABILITY SERVICES OF THE SOUTHWEST (DSSW)

To ensure a lifestyle filled with opportunity, independence, and empowerment is accessible and affordable, DSSW works in conjunction with specialized government programs to provide practical and truly indispensable services to persons with disabilities in Texas. Learn more about DSSW's programs and services at <http://www.dssw.org>.

HALFTHEPLANET EXHIBITS AT THE WCD VIRTUAL EXPO

The World Congress & Exposition on Disabilities is currently giving a sneak preview of the Virtual WCD. The World Congress & Exposition on Disabilities has become the leading event for professionals to meet, discuss and provide advice for and support to children and adults with disabilities alongside with their families and caregivers. This year's event is scheduled for September 28-30 in Atlanta, Georgia, and at that time, the Virtual WCD will be officially launched. The VWCD is an ongoing, online, interactive expo, modeled after their successful annual event, where individuals can locate disability-related products, services, and information. HalfthePlanet is proud to be an exhibitor and invites you to preview this rich informational resource at <http://www.vwcdexpo.com>. A brief registration process is required, but this is a free service and resource.

TOP-RANKED JOURNALS ON MENTAL RETARDATION ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE FOR FREE DURING 2001

The American Association on Mental Retardation announced that its two top-ranked journals are available online and accessible to all online readers for the remainder of 2001. Mental Retardation is a journal on policy, practices, and perspectives. The American Journal on Mental Retardation is the leading research journal in Special Education and Rehabilitation categories, according to the latest Journal Citation Reports from the Institute for Scientific Information. Visit AAMR journals online for free in 2001 at <http://aamr.allenpress.com>. Click on 'Journal Information' under the cover illustration to discover everything about our highly-ranked journals. For more information about AAMR's journals, contact Bruce Appelgren via email at brucea@aamr.org.

HalfthePlanet is pleased to offer this monthly newsletter with disability related news from HalfthePlanet and its partners. We urge you to visit the HalfthePlanet web site at <http://www.halftheplanet.org> for disability-related news and resources that are added on an ongoing basis and our online community bulletin board discussions.

Comments, suggestions, and questions about this newsletter are welcome. Please send an email to info@halftheplanet.org. To subscribe to this newsletter go to <http://www.halftheplanet.org> §

A Solution to bridging the distance in AT education

By Marge Turowski

Source: *Closing The Gap, April/May 2001, Volume 20 - Number 1*

AT service providers have all been there. A client is seen at the clinic, school or in the home. An assessment is completed, recommendations are made, and devices are purchased. Some time later the client is seen again, either in a follow-up visit or through another referral. When the client or his caregivers are asked about the previous recommendations, it is discovered that the wonderful technology hasn't even made it out of the box. The villain is a lack of community-based technical support for the client and those who assist him. These situations occur everywhere but seem to be particularly problematic in rural areas and with individuals who are no longer served by the public schools.

The solution seems obvious. Training is what is needed here. But who receives the training? From whom? Where? How? Four partner agencies have attempted to answer these questions for 20 rural counties in western North Carolina with a collaborative continuing education program. Western Carolina Center, a regional residential center for persons with developmental disabilities, Western Carolina Center Foundation (now the J.I. Riddle Institute), Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, and the Kate B. Reynold's Ability Program collaborated in the development of Partners in Assistive Technology Training and Service (PATTS), a teaching and learning partnership.

The need for a continuing education program in assistive technology in the rural, mountainous area served by the project was underscored by the overwhelming positive response from AT service providers in the region. Exploration of options already available revealed the current programs were, in large part, geared to teach intermediate and advanced students, most were affiliated with colleges and universities, and most were beyond the financial means of the target population.

The PATTS partners sought to increase access to and successful use of assistive technology by individuals with assistive technology needs by

DIRECTIONS on CD A Comprehensive Assistive Technology Resource

Last 2+ Volumes
1997 - 1999
24 issues & more!
Dozens of AT articles

Call us today!

DREAMMS for Kids, Inc.
Assistive Technology Solutions
273 Ringwood Road
Freeville, NY 13068-5606

only
\$24.99

Phone: 607-539-3027

Fax: 607-539-9930

www.dreamms.org

Thank You To.....

*The Spurlino Foundation
Publix Super Market Charities
Raytheon Systems - Repro Dept
Our Advertisers & Supporters*

providing affordable continuing education opportunities for service providers and consumers through the existing North Carolina community college system. Their goals were to increase the pool of service providers with basic AT expertise; empower AT consumers, their families and caregivers through knowledge; create a curriculum tailored to the community college model; and strengthen the network of AT service providers through mentoring relationships.

The project development team created a continuing education curriculum, offered through the Continuing Education program at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, for a traditional seated program consisting of five, eight-week long courses and a demonstration project. Because of the broad scope of assistive technology and to contribute to the development of networks of providers, skilled providers were recruited as guest lecturers. Students were assigned to a mentor who was skilled in the AT area addressed in the student's demonstration project. The fee for

each course was \$55. Grant funds from the Kate B. Reynolds Ability Program II were used to jump start the program by defraying student and mentor costs including tuition, travel, and demonstration project materials.

Student feedback after each class and after each course was used to make course adjustments. This feedback identified the need for several major adjustments. Time and travel proved to be the greatest barriers to participation in the program. Also deemed important was the need to standardize the material presented, thereby reducing gaps and redundancies caused by the use of guest lecturers.

Emphasis has shifted from the seated program to the development of a Web-based distance learning format. The original five courses have been condensed to four and the schedule has been revised so that the program can be completed in 26 weeks instead of 40 weeks. Because PATTS is a continuing education program rather than a curriculum program, the tuition will remain \$55 per course regardless of student residency. Guest lecturers with

national recognition are being sought to help with the development of a number of learning units. Students will develop their own network of local and regional resources in addition to their demonstration project mentor. The completion of the conversion of the program to the distance format is projected for July 1, 2001. Additional information is available from Elaine Lockhart, Dean of Corporate and Continuing Education at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute in Hudson, North Carolina 28638 or at elockhart@caldwell.cc.nc.us.

DON'T FORGET !!

The 19th Annual Closing The Gap Conference will be held on October 18-20, 2001 in Minneapolis, MN

For more information:

Closing The Gap
P.O. Box 68, 526 Main St.,
Henderson, MN 56044
Phone: 507-248-3294
Fax: 507-248-3810
E-mail: info@closingthegap.com
Web site: www.closingthegap.com



D R E A M M S
for kids, Inc.

Assistive Technology Solutions

273 Ringwood Road • Freeville, NY 13068-5606

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 13
FREEVILLE, NY