National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems

Student-Directed Individualized Education Plan (IEP):

Bringing Person-Centered Practices to Schools and Beyond

Q&A and Resources

Questions from the Audience

Q1: Many of my students and families prefer informal / family supports over formal supports (e.g., programs, institutions, group homes..) which IEPs don't usually take seriously. How do we incorporate/support informal supports through IEP?

Lynn: Yes, IEP's don't take informal supports seriously or at least overlook them, while also completely depending on them for a student's ability to learn and succeed. For us this is true regarding the use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).
The pandemic is an extreme example of this. Despite all the difficulties remote schooling has created for our family, it's also highlighted the importance of informal and family supports at every turn. This year is a natural time to take some time to document these supports, share them with the IEP team, and request that the IEP reflect them. Families could request to add informal supports in the "Parent/Student Concern," or "Accommodations" sections of the IEP.
Also, I suspect there may be (transition) assessments, beyond the standard 3-year evals, that would capture informal home supports. I don't have experience with one to recommend.

Miso: Informal supports, especially from my parents, were crucial in my academic and post-secondary "success." I think one way IEP teams can incorporate informal supports is thinking of, and treating student's family members and close friends/neighbors as collaborators and experts – experts in knowing the student and wanting the best for the student beyond the school context. People who make up the "informal support" circle may not be "professionals," but in many cases, they interact with the student in more dynamic ways than those who only interact with the student in school setting.

Q2: How can we encourage students early on to take part in meetings? No one likes a meeting, and some students say it is boring, but strategies to try... maybe how you first got engaged? [We answered this question live; below is an additional response provided in written format.]

Lynn: My daughter is intimidated by the large formal meeting format with her being the *SUBJECT* of the meeting, and she also finds them boring. It was important to have her meet with key people like her educational case manager, and her speech therapist in much smaller, shorter meetings throughout the school year, *BEFORE* the IEP meeting; where she could express her preferences about her classes, and begin to articulate her own IEP vision statement. These were ways she could become more the *AUTHOR* of her meeting, despite mostly listening during the actual meeting. Breaking a problem down into manageable bits is my approach. Start small, start brief. Like so many of the panelists advised, start as early as you can.
Possibly find a role other than being the "subject' of the meeting might help some students, in an area where they feel confident. Bring and pass out snacks (in some future post-pandemic life), take attendance, read or pre-record and speak something, etc.

Emily: I think it's so important for students to know and really feel that this is THEIR meeting. It is important that they know who the people are who are coming to their meeting. I think it would be great if the student was the one to invite people to their meeting and if they only had the people who they feel comfortable with in their meeting. If it were my meeting and there were a lot of strangers there, I wouldn't feel comfortable speaking either.

Miso: I started inviting specific teachers in my later high school years because I knew they would be supportive of me. Echoing Emily's response, I think if we allow students to be in charge from the beginning such as inviting people they would like to invite, I think it would make it more student-friendly experience.

Q3: Also, how can we address parents who do NOT want their child at the meeting? The meetings can be negative, having the student makes them more positive but how do we get started if the parent opposes?

Emily: Start with the assumption that the child will be at their meeting. Work with the child to be prepared and comfortable with their upcoming meeting. Let the parents know along the way the work you have been doing with their child to help them be ready for THEIR meeting. So instead of asking parents if they want their child there, assume the child will be their as long as the child wants to be there.

Q4: Has anyone tried a practice or mock IEP meeting?

Emily: That is a great idea! In staff trainings on student-led IEP meetings, I have invited the teachers to take different roles as the student and other professionals in the IEP meeting and have a mock meeting. I have them first do it how a typical IEP meeting runs and then I ask them to have the person who is playing the student role to take the lead for the meeting. This exercise has a powerful impact to help the team step into the shoes of others and especially the student and imagine how the student can the best experience in their meeting.

Miso: I was never given an opportunity to practice, but I do think it is a valuable practice.

Q5: As a student, who in your path was your 'change agent'....who in your life/team introduced the idea of self -advocacy...Choice and Voice....was there any one person that took the lead with you?

Miso: My parents played an important role in helping me realize the importance of self-advocacy and speaking up. It was in part because I was in a position of being a more fluent English speaker but even before my family came to the U.S., my parents emphasized independence, pursuing my dreams, and talking about my disability with others.

Q6: I am a social worker working with kids on IEP's from 3-7. How can we be student driven or involve kids despite their young age?

Emily: That is such a great question! I think the concept of meetings is really an adult thing. I would think about how to make the meetings something the child looks forward to, like maybe everyone brings something that reminds them of the child like a box of crayons if the child loves to draw or game or a candy they like etc. This will help the child associate the meeting with fun and a place they like to be. So maybe the meeting begins by everyone giving the child what they brought for them and telling them how it reminds them of the child. This will feel great for the child and also be a very positive way to begin the meeting. It will get everyone's focus on who this amazing young person is as a unique individual!

Q7: This question is for Miso, Mary Abby, and Sarah - Was employment ever discussed in your IEP meetings? And was your state vocational rehabilitation agency invited to those planning meetings?

Miso: Yes it was briefly discussed in high school. My goals were often framed in my academic work and developing independent living skills (e.g., orientation and mobility) but not so much career-oriented framing. Transitioning from school district to vocational rehabilitation system was a challenging one, and I do wish that my school IEP team had done more to facilitate that process to be as smooth and seamless as possible.

Q8: Is there any person-centered IEP meeting videos or examples so we can see what one looks like?

Lynn: Person-centered Transition Planning webcast
https://www.perkinselearning.org/videos/webcast/person-centered-transition-planning

Resources

[The resources are displayed in the order that was shared in the chat window during the webinar]

Charting the LifeCourse: https://www.lifecoursetools.com/
PCAST - Person Centered Approaches in Schools and Transition [New Jersey]:
https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/projects/PCAST.html
Promoting Student Voice - Punchbowl Public School [Australia]: https://punchbowl-p.schools.nsw.gov.au/preschool/promoting-student-voice.html
A Child Voice model for children with disabilities to thrive in the future: [Plumtree – Australia] https://plumtree.org.au/blog/a-child-voice-model-for-children-with-disabilities-to-thrive-in-the-future/
MyLife – Dashboard Demo for TransitionExample:
https://www.cognitopia.com/apps/MyLife/demo/TransitionExample/browse
Children's Assessment of Participation and Enjoyment (CAPE):
https://www.sralab.org/rehabilitation-measures/childrens-assessment-participation-and-enjoyment-preferences-activities
Participation and Environment Measure for Children and Youth (PEM-CY):
https://canchild.ca/en/shop/2-pem-cy-participation-and-environment-measure-children-and-youth
7 Keys to Citizenship: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=avnKfGJm81k
Person-Centered Approaches in Schools and Transition [New Jersey]:
https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/transition/person.shtml
I'm Determined | Empowering self-determined behavior: https://www.imdetermined.org/
Self-Directed IEP Using the MyLife Tool in Cognitopia: https://youtu.be/xHOUaRxA8XQ