

Standards Based IEPs: A New Way to Do Business

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November 12, 2009
Hot Springs, AR

All things old will be new again. Wait and the pendulum will swing back again.

It is strange how much truth is in these statements. It doesn't matter if you are thinking of styles in clothes, or practices in special education; the cycle will come around again.

As time passes, and there is change, we always see a period of doubt with questioning, but then with acceptance comes success. Remember the stories of the people who thought airplanes could not fly? Then when they did, the ultimate was that they certainly could never fly without propellers. I well remember when many people thought you could not boil water and could never cook in a microwave oven. I bet even the younger generation here will remember when many people in the public thought that cell phones were a fad and would never be widely used. The idea of receiving e mails or taking photos with a phone would never happen.

My my...the difference the passing of time can make.

As we begin our conversation on Standards Based IEPs, you may recognize some good ideas which were standard practice some years ago.

For just a moment I want to quickly refresh your memories of where we have been as we have reached where we are today. It was through much of this past experience that we are where we are today.

Beginning in the late 1940s and continuing into the 50s, educators began recognizing the need to make different arrangements for teaching students. It was the beginning work toward recognition that all students were not the same. Based on this assumption the best practice at that time was to separate

students who could not keep up with the general population, thus began ‘Special Education.’”

The early approach to teaching these students was based on a medical model. Rightly so because educators were not trained at that time to know much about disabilities, their origins or how to deal with them. Medical authorities were the only recognized professionals who were thought to have any expertise in that area.

Education with this model tended to offer functional activities with much of the emphasis on hardly more than an arts and crafts curriculum. Some attempts were made to correct the disability—especially those disabilities which were manifested with physical conditions.

As time passed and educators became more informed, diagnostic procedures became more sophisticated. It was then that we freely began to label students according to some scale and even further isolating them from the general education population. As the labeling process continued more students were identified and special education became even more “special”. Due to this new “special education” became the presumed need to separate the students even more into self contained classes and often out of the regular education buildings. A basic skills curriculum grew from these early experiences.

Again as the years passed the concept of normalization came back into the schools which eventually led to Mainstreaming or as we might know it today as inclusion.

Landmark legislation in the form of state mandated provisions for special education students began to appear across the country in early to mid 1960. Arkansas was among those states to require the offering of services to disabled students with the passage of our Act 102. While this legislation offered services, it was not accompanied with an appropriation which would be sufficient to carry out this mandate.

It was not until late in the 1990s and the passage of the first IDEA that true access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities became a mandate and a reality across the country. This started the movement that dramatically changed how states and local education agencies functioned.

Accountability for student learning became foremost, and educators were faced with the challenge of improving the academic achievement of all students, including students with disabilities.

This legislation led to an emphasis on academics and access to the general ed curriculum. Isolated special schools with separate programming were de-emphasized and a new day dawned for the education of students with disabilities. A new term in education circles was least restrictive environment. This was the same LRE we know today.

The requirement of IEPs for students with disabilities that were based on measurable goals and objectives were the heart of the instructional program. These IEPs took on a variety of approaches and even with the attempt to standardize them with computerized templates, these often were still not the useful teaching instruments that were needed.

Further advancement was seen with the passage of NCLB and the 2004 IDEA legislation. These new laws came with an emphasis on removing silos and gave real meaning to ‘access’ for students with disabilities accompanied by enforceable accountability through sanctions to the schools.

As a part of these new requirements states were expected to develop both content and achievement standards. Arkansas has been recognized nationally for the quality and rigor in our academic content standards.

It is important to remember what content and achievement standards are -- and how they are different.

ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS are the content and skills the students should learn in explicit detail. These standards are expectations for student achievement. They answer the question, “What do we expect students to know and be able to do by the time they complete each grade and/or graduate?”

ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS are clear statements of the criteria needed to demonstrate achievement of the standard.

Along with the new legislation was the requirement that all students would be assessed based on the grade level standards. This ushered in the era of multiple tests and the results of which were used to grade schools on adequate yearly progress, followed by sanctions for those schools who failed to meet the projected performance targets.

While it is recognized that testing is ultimately necessary to track student progress, we have failed to remember that it is instruction which drives the education process. Instruction should drive assessment not assessment driving what happens in the classroom.

As we face the final countdown to the year 2014, we are supposed to see the result that all students are proficient and that all students will be reading on grade level as outlined in the original NCLB legislation.

Realizing that many schools have been in improvement status for multiple years and that many students with disabilities are not making the academic progress they should, we now must face some reality and make some changes because something is not working well.

Remembering that instruction drives assessment, it naturally then would become necessary to improve instruction if we expect to see improvement in assessment scores.

Through the years we have seen some changes in the required forms of the IEP. Unfortunately, through these years, we have recognized that the IEPs we see in many of our monitoring visits today are not meeting the requirements and more importantly, they are not meeting the needs of the students.

The IEPs are often 1) not individualized for the student; 2) represent a repeat of the same goals from year to year; 3) neglect to include information which would help drive instruction; 4) fail to present a present level of performance that would be useful or meaningful.

Because of these problems and a myriad of others, we are beginning a major effort to improve this situation.

The process we will use is patterned after the original work of Marla Holbrook of the Alabama Department of Education. Alabama is recognized as the premier example of Standards Based IEPs in action. Much of this success is related to the work, training, and guidance given by Marla. She has worked with us previously and will be with us again for intensive training at Special Show this summer.

The recognized steps to developing Standards Based IEPs are fairly consistent in states with successful programs. We will be following these same steps to help us ensure our success as well.

I am reminded of a statement Ruth Ryder, an administrator from OSEP, used when she said, "It doesn't matter which ship you came over on. We are all in the same boat now." That is our position as well. It doesn't matter what has gone on previously or how we got to this position. We all face the problem now and we will improve.

For about a year now you have heard information on Standards Based IEPs. At first we in the Department were exploring the use of Standards Based IEPs. We did training with the staff of our office to get a reading of the need, interest and feasibility of requiring these Standards Based IEPs statewide.

After our staff became acquainted with the concept and procedures, we held an informational conference in the spring to introduce Standards Based IEPs to some LEAs and other interested parties. The evaluations of all the trainings were highly positive toward the use of Standards Based IEPs. Based on this experience and the movement nationwide, the decision has been made that the time has come to move to a Standards Based IEP. In much of this you will see that it may be a return to an old practice which will be somewhat familiar to some of you.

This is definitely not a new concept. You will recognize many elements of what was once used in our IEPs. This is just an organized way to make certain that standards are used for instruction and in a way that will be meaningful to the student, the parents and the school staff.

It is our intent to phase this new approach with these timelines.

November 2009	Introduce Standards Based IEPs at state CEC
Early Spring 2010	Committee work Philosophy and Policy Training/Professional Development Forms Pilot design/Roll out
July 2010	Overview/Training Special Show–Hot Springs Intensive training LEAs Special Show
Fall 2010	Pilot project roll-out
Spring 2011	Evaluation of Pilot Project
Spring 2011	Rule change/forms out for comment/ State Board
Fall 2011	Require use of Standards Based IEPs in schools

This short presentation is in no way to be considered as an in-depth training on Standards Based IEPs. This is intended to introduce the concept, relate it to where we have been, and what we are presently seeing in practice in the field. The goal is to show how Standard Based IEPs can provide the information and guidance for instruction, learning, assessment and reporting as is intended in the law and regulations.

All students must be assessed on academic content standards. Equally as important is the fact all students must be given the opportunities to learn the content standards. Standards-based instruction is teaching all students the academic content standards for the purpose of improving academic performance.

IEPs are the answer to providing full access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities.

Basing the student's IEP on grade-level content standards provides opportunities to learn the same content as general education students and address the unique needs presented by the student's disability.

Much of the success of the application of the standards based IEP depends on the role and knowledge of the IEP Team. This Team is responsible for developing the IEP and is charged with seeing that it is realistic, meaningful,

and contains the necessary components to deliver the results from the standards based goals.

This responsibility requires that IEP Team members become knowledgeable about areas that were traditionally considered “general or regular” education.

A standards based IEP is one in which the IEP team has incorporated state content standards in its development.

The IEP is the document that addresses the ways that the student’s disability impacts learning. The IEP also develops a program so that the student’s individual needs are met so that those needs do not become a barrier to reaching high standards.

We as educators must develop IEPs that not only guarantee and provide access to the general education curriculum, but same IEP must provide the services, supports, and specialized instruction necessary to succeed in the general education curriculum.

Step One in developing Standards Based IEPs is to consider the grade-level content standards for the grade the student is enrolled.

In the beginning, the Team must ask—What is the student expected to know and be able to do from this standard? What is the intent of the content standard?

At this point, the Resource Guide will become invaluable because it describes the standard in the lowest terms. The expression of the “essence” of the standard has already been determined for you along with suggested teaching ideas.

By looking at the grade-level standards 2 grades below the standard, will supply pre-requisite skills the student should know before attempting this skill.

STEP TWO is to examine classroom and student data to determine where the student is functioning in relation to the grade-level standard. There is no need to plan where to go if you don’t know where the student is presently functioning.

How can a goal be written based on a grade-level standard without knowing what the student can do in relation to the expectations for this standard. Consideration must be given to all sources data including classroom data, progress monitoring data, previous IEP data, and benchmark exam results.

Also the IEP Team must determine what strategies have worked with the student in the past. Information from past teachers is helpful because there is no need to expect the student to achieve from isolated spelling words if that has never worked before.

STEP THREE is the absolute key to writing a successful/useful/meaningful Standards Based IEP. It is imperative that the student's true present level of achievement and functional performance be developed in each area of the IEP.

This present level of achievement must include the student's strengths, needs and how the disability affects the performance in general education curriculum; thus necessitating special services.

Development of an impact statement that considers the challenges to master the content standard is very important.

At this point, it is useful to review student response to instruction from teacher observations, progress reports, state assessments, classroom assessments, eligibility data and parental input.

In determining a student's present level of functioning, remember NOT to use a student's disability as a way the disability impacts/affects the student's learning.

INCORRECT EXAMPLE

Mary's learning disability negatively impacts her ability to do math word problems.

Bill's cognitive disability makes it impossible for him to reach grade level.

These statements are downers—depressing and totally useless in expressing a positive learning statement.

This is an example of a present level of functioning that is specific—helpful—based on a standard and the student's special need.

Judy's difficulties with reading comprehension and reading fluency negatively affect her performance in solving math word problems or timed classroom assessments.

Can you see the increased degree of helpful information?

Robert

Look at this example of a statement of a good present level of performance.

Robert listens to stories from a variety of media and demonstrates a preference for computer stories with visuals and sound effects. He can listen for information, answer simple factual questions and recall major events from the story. He needs additional instruction on listening for understanding in order to predict events and make inferences. Robert may experience difficulty with abstract concepts and understanding implications of characters' actions and/or the author's intent.

Can you find the student's strengths? Needs? And how the disability impacts learning?

STEP FOUR

Once the present level of performance is written we are now able to get to the core of the IEP—the development of measurable annual goals aligned to grade-level content standards.

Before beginning to write the goals—these questions should be asked.

1. What can the student reasonably be expected to accomplish in one school year?
2. How will the outcome of the goal be measured?

3. What level of accuracy can be expected on the content?
4. What level of accuracy is necessary to be prepared for next year's grade-level standards?

Remember the needs as stated before for Robert as stated in the standard—listening and understanding and predicting and drawing inferences.

With these markers in mind, it would be simple to write a meaningful annual goal such as this.

“After listening to stories Robert will make predictions and draw inferences with an average of 90% accuracy on curriculum-based assessments by the end of the 6th grading period.

Measurable annual IEP goals should include these components:

- The student—(Who)
- Will do what—(Behavior)
- To what level or degree—(criterion measurement)
- Under what conditions—(Conditions)
- In what length of time—(Time frame)

Can you identify these components from Robert's example?

- The student—Robert
- Will do what—listen to stories to make predictions and draw inferences
- To what degree -90% accuracy
- Under what conditions—curriculum based assessments
- Time frame—end of 6th grading period

STEP FIVE is to identify the ways to assess and report student progress throughout the year.

This can be done with a variety of curriculum-based assessments to measure progress. These in class assessments should provide practice using the types of assessment formats used on state assessments. Also timed classroom assessments will provide experience under test-like conditions.

STEP SIX is the natural follow up to the goal setting. Now it is time to identify specifically designed instruction including accommodations and/or

modifications needed to access and progress in the general education curriculum.

Framers of the IEP must take caution and become aware of what accommodations are needed to enable the student to access the knowledge and skills in the general education curriculum. Also they must consider what accommodations have been used in the past and most important were they effective? An underlying principle is to make certain that the complexities of the material has not been changed in such a way that the content has been modified and bastardized the essence of the standard. This would defeat the entire process.

STEP SEVEN is the final step in the preparation of the standards based IEP. This one is the actual proof of the pudding. The Team must determine the most appropriate assessment option for the student.

This is done by reviewing:

The types of assessments available

Benchmark exams with accommodations

Benchmark exams without accommodations

Alternate portfolio assessment for students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

The accommodations necessary for the student to have equal access to the exam.

Read aloud

Extra Time

Small group

Scribes

The next year will be an exciting time as we prepare for this new way of doing business. We will take it slow and with purpose. We will see that training and practice is made available to you. Various committees will help us guide the work and I know by the Fall of 2011 we will be ready for this new challenge.