

## IEP Team Member Collaboration and Coordination: Beware of the Furniture

### In this Issue...

Early in his presidency former movie and TV actor Ronald Reagan was asked what it takes to become a star in Hollywood. He replied, "Understand your role. Know your lines. Don't bump into the furniture." The same holds true for Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members who must establish and maintain a high level of collaboration and coordination in the consideration of assistive technology for children with disabilities. Team members must understand their roles and work together for the benefit of kids, parents and teachers. Yet, as simple as Reagan's secret to Hollywood success appears, executing its components remains a challenge for all actors. The same holds true for IEP team members seeking an optimum level of collaboration: You have to know where the furniture is in order to avoid the bruises collision with it can cause in the form of contentiousness and possible litigation. This issue examines the role of the IEP team's AT coordinator as well as IEP team member collaboration and the ingredients to create it, build it and make it stick.

### John Castellani, Ph.D. Speaks

Today, Dr. John Castellani, Associate Professor, Teacher Development and Leadership, Center for Technology in Education (CTE), Johns Hopkins University, is Program Director of the Maryland Assistive Technology Network (MATN). MATN trains AT coordinators in all 24 counties statewide, as well as the Maryland School for the Blind and School for the Deaf. MATN has as its primary responsibility to train and support educators, related service personnel, administrators, and parents on the consideration and implementation of assistive technology.



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In the late 1980s, however, John was a budding psychologist during his undergraduate days at Kent State University. He saw his academic career and life take a fateful turn when he accepted a position as an assistant to a quadriplegic. "I worked for this gentleman three days a week," Dr. Castellani recalls. "My time with him honed my empathy for those who struggle with disabilities every day, day after day, and still succeed." From that point on, he remembers, "I knew I wanted to work with individuals with disabilities." Still in college, he moved on to a job at a nearby mental health center "where I was amazed at the number of patients who were dual diagnosed with a special education disability as well as a psychological disability." There he became very good friends with one of the psychiatric nurses with whom he shared a shift. Her husband was a special education professor at Kent State.

"This was in 1990; the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was renamed as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and included a big move toward transition." Federal funding, he recalls, was plentiful for graduate programs that trained special education teachers as long as the training included a transition component. Kent State University had just been awarded a grant to institute such a program. "I was very fortunate and took advantage of it in the form of a full scholarship for my Masters."

He combined his new commitment to special ed with his love for psychology, a combination which helped him land a job working with adult services in Washington, DC. Three years later he became a classroom teacher in Fairfax County, VA. "That's where I first became very interested in technology and how it could benefit kids. This was in 1993, when technology was just beginning to emerge in the classroom. I set up a small computer lab in my class. That eventually led to a job in the county's AT services department."

His Fairfax connections aided him in meeting Mike Behrmann, a professor at George Mason University who oversaw one of the nation's few AT doctoral programs. After completing the doctoral program Dr. Castellani met Linda Tsantis, and became co-coordinator, with Linda, of the Technology for Education program at Johns Hopkins University, with whom he collaborated on several articles on data mining and the use of data in special education.

"After several years at JHU, Jackie Nunn, Director of the Center for Technology in Education at JHU, and I wrote a proposal to Carol Ann Baglin, our state special ed director, that in 2003 resulted in me being named to coordinate Maryland's first statewide IEP, a post I held until last year. The electronic IEP project is now being implemented in nine school systems statewide."

According to John, the electronic IEP concept will change the landscape by enabling schools to quickly pull significant data from IEPs and make decisions about aggregate information. "This is already happening," he declares. "Universal implementation of this concept will change the way we look at accountability and monitoring, resulting in a more proactive approach in schools. The data is finally instantly available. For school systems that use this process the days of digging through hard copy files are over."

Supporting our interview with Dr. Castellani are resources to assist parents and other IEP team members in further understanding their roles in the IEP process. We also feature members of our Knowledge Network. The members spotlighted this month focus on various aspects of IEP team member collaboration and its AT component. We invite you to contact these members for further information.

Please share this newsletter with other organizations, families and professionals who may benefit from it. We invite you to contact us at <http://www.fctd.info>. We welcome feedback, new members and all who contribute to our growing knowledge base.



## IEP AT Services: The AT Coordinator Is the Linchpin

An Interview with John Castellani, Ph.D., Associate Professor,  
Johns Hopkins University and Program Director,  
Maryland Assistive Technology Network (MATN)

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) may be considered both a process and a document that focuses on the academic advancement of a child with one or more disabilities. The process involves a group of professionals and parents, each of whom brings a unique perspective to the table.



John Castellani, Ph.D.

Consideration and acquisition of assistive technology revolves around just one IEP team member: the individual who actually coordinates AT over time. It is he or she who must balance the interests of team members with the needs of the child and the child's family. It's a job that often calls for diplomatic skills and technological expertise.

Dr. John Castellani is a John Hopkins associate professor with long experience in training individuals to serve as AT coordinators on IEP teams. The Maryland Assistive Technology Network (MATN) trains over 350 people statewide who serve as assistive technology leaders in their school districts. Dr. Castellani and Jeanne Dwyer have been leading the MATN for the past four years. "We coordinate technical assistance and training to those individuals on a train-the-trainer model. We also hold two Maryland conferences each year on issues pertaining to AT and universal design for learning. The most recent conference included teachers, vendors, parents and related-service people. The leadership team is the primary group that we support."

The AT process in an IEP setting, John says, should consist of the following four steps:

1. Consideration of AT, where the AT is documented on the IEP
2. Choice of AT trials, where the AT is tested in the classroom, home and in the environment where the child will be working with the technology
3. Selection of one or more AT devices and implementation, including training
4. Monitoring of the child's progress.

He comments, "A person who coordinates the IEP for the initial consideration is often not the person responsible for

the other three steps. He/she might be responsible for monitoring progress, or there is a person who is designated as an IEP team leader but is not necessarily the individual who would coordinate all the services."

### The Parent's Role: Accountability Expert

The parent is important in the IEP team mix because he/she generally knows the child best, John explains. "In an ideal world the student would be the person who would act as his/her own advocate, who would take their device or software or computer with him/her to any destination. However, nine out of 10 times that does not happen." The key, he declares, is ensuring that parents understand their role as second-in-charge. Parents may not be the IEP team leader but they can at least be the individual who is checking in to make sure IEP stipulations are being met, including the AT component.



"Teachers have a lot on their plate," Dr. Castellani acknowledges. "Their focus is finite, given their myriad responsibilities. In the years I've spent training teachers I've found that the more a trainer trains, the less, it seems, that trainees learn. My own research tells me that training has proven most effective when it involves a parent who understands the four steps of the process and who becomes the IEP team's accountability expert."

The teacher who is the IEP team leader "is the individual who is going to make sure that educationally the right things happen. But as far as being able to coordinate among related service professionals, the parent has the strongest voice."

Unfortunately, John adds, parents, and even teachers, are too often reluctant to assume that role. The reason for parental reluctance, he points out, "has little to do with their willingness to accept it; they do not consider themselves expert in AT and are therefore reluctant to assume the mantle of leadership."

### No Such Thing as an AT Expert

"There was no AT expert at the IEP meeting." That's a frequent post-meeting comment, John says. "The truth is that there is no such thing as an AT expert per se. Parents are less likely than even a teacher to assume the expert's role because often they don't have an idea of what is available technologically and educationally." What they do have, John emphasizes, is a solid understanding of their child.

Parents who are tech savvy, of course, are the exception, he adds, as are parents who have done much research about AT on the Web, or a parent who has actually gone through AT training. "I've seen some cases where parents have attended specific software or tool training. It happens less often when their child has mild disabilities and learning disabilities. When a child has a severe disability parents have little choice. Immersion is sometimes the only approach."

With more severe disabilities there is less ambiguity about advocating for that child, John notes. "In those cases there are issues with devices going home and being used. The coordination process in those instances becomes awkward. When parents advocate for those devices to be sent home, IEP teams usually comply "because all that has to be done is for parents to sign a simple form like they do for their child's books at the beginning of the school year."

### **A Range of Service Delivery Models**

Through his long association with Hopkins' Center for Technology in Education (CTE) and MATN, a CTE affiliated project, Dr. Castellani has helped train AT coordinators in 24 Maryland school districts, Maryland School for the Blind and the Maryland School for the Deaf. Each district and school has a different service delivery model.

"You either have an expert model – and parents need to understand this – where someone will come in and do the AT selection, the acquisition and train the parent and the student and the teacher and whomever else is relevant on the use of the technology or there will be someone in the school building who is the designated AT 'expert' to whom everyone gravitates. Or there will be a teacher who is a floater, independently attending conferences and trying to learn the AT ropes."

According to John, a school principal, when he or she becomes involved in the IEP process, wields the most influence and bargaining power in a school district. "No parent needs to have the principal as the first stop, but parents should become closely acquainted with the role of the administrative hierarchy in the acquisition process of assistive technology. Parents should understand how equipment is purchased, how decisions are made, how assessments are conducted, and how equipment is supported in the classroom. They should also have a good understanding of the service delivery model and how it fits into the hierarchy and the system and also the principal's role, since there are often multiple methods for obtaining and supporting assistive technology across districts

The best way to gain that comprehensive understanding, he emphasizes, is by visiting their child's school and working with the teacher. "I've rarely seen a teacher refuse to permit

a parent to enter his/her classroom."

### **A Parent Centered IEP Process**

In Maryland, he says, the IEP process is parent centered. "The main reason it's parent centered – and this does and does not work depending on the parent who's involved – is that before the IEP is even developed, forms are sent home to the parents so that the parents can discuss the child's personality and history, and offer any insight into the child's past educational experiences, as a basis for trying to connect the dots."

In most states, he alleges, IEPs are done the previous year for the following year. They are formulated by an IEP team leader who is not the individual responsible for implementing the IEP the following year. Although planning is included for the following year, kids change, classroom teachers change, and technology may or may not follow the child.

A Maryland IEP team must include a public agency representative, either a special education leader in the school, or a principal, who also participates in the initial assessment

The team leader is responsible for collecting the initial information about a student's preferences and interests and making sure that the information is passed along to any other agency that might be involved. After obtaining that information the team ultimately creates an initial set of goals. The IEP contains six major components:

- Identifying and meeting information
- Present level of academic achievement and functional performance
- Special considerations and accommodations, which includes assistive technology and instructional and testing accommodations
- Goals and objectives
- Related services to be provided
- Special education placement data

The related services component includes a service initiation date, the duration of the specific service, and who will provide that service, including AT; the supplementary aids or services section includes the accommodations and modifications or supports needed, including AT.

This is a big undertaking for a single individual, the AT coordinator. "The goal is to get as much information from the parents as possible as well as input from other necessary individuals about solutions that needs to be implemented." For example, John explains, "if a child attends general ed classes for half of the day, the special ed teacher will not necessarily accompany the student to those classes. Somebody who can talk with the child and reinforce what the teacher

is doing, which may involve a parent, and in a perfect world all IEP team members, attending his/her child's classes and interacting with the child's teachers, is helpful and is something that parents need to consider doing."

Parental presence in a child's classes and interaction with a child's teacher is not common, says Dr. Castellani, "This level of parental involvement usually occurs, unfortunately, only when a situation becomes contentious. Whereas simple visits to the school for 10 minutes can be effective because administrators and teachers need to see a parent every now and then. As a teacher, I recall parents of a student with an IEP visiting my class on a Friday for a field trip just to help chaperone. That is a useful tactic for the parent, the child and the teacher."

The benefit to the parent is that the parent gets a better sense of the other students who surround the child and how her child interacts with them, John notes. "Some parents would come in just to perform some mundane chores for me, which freed me to be more creative in my teaching approach. Bringing in snacks for the class is a good idea, so is helping out by doing tasks like photo copying. In other words it is important for parents of kids with IEPs to have some sort of a physical presence periodically because a lot of valuable communication happens during those times when the parent is there."



The main purpose of an IEP is to communicate and collaborate, he asserts. "To achieve the desired level of collaboration and communication between teacher and parent face time is required, if only a few minutes every few weeks. You can cover a lot of ground in those few minutes about a child's issues and successes."

While a child is encouraged to attend IEP meetings so that team members can glean first-hand information from the student, Dr. Castellani acknowledges that child participation in an IEP meeting is a heavy responsibility, especially for a child with cognitive issues. "That's why, if a child is unable to attend, it's very important to get as much of that prior information as possible about the student's desires and needs. Unfortunately, this level of detailed communication takes time, not something teachers have a lot of to spare."

The major portion of responsibility for consistently accessing this information, however, lays with the child's parents, not his/her teacher. "Parents know the child the best and know what connections the child is making in his or her life with things they are interested in and others they are friends

with. That's why the state of Maryland maintains a parent-friendly approach. We have a set of forms that go home to the parents. That's probably not the best way to do it but from a logistics perspective it works. Even when parents simply identify what a student likes and what motivates him/her it is a help. For example, a child might love going to the zoo, so the more events and instruction that's tied to the zoo the better. A child might favor a certain singer. So when the teacher is working with reading materials she should employ some materials on that singer. The child might like a certain movie or relate to Teletubbies."

Whatever works, whatever best engages the child is good, John says. "This is especially important if a child is non-verbal. A teacher who is not exposed to the child in a relaxed home environment can't possibly pick these preferences up. The teacher can't watch as the child selects a video that he/she likes. Maybe the child follows and emulates a brother or sister. Only a parent who is present in the home can watch this interaction closely and understand the child's preferences and dislikes." The parent perspective infuses invaluable understanding into the IEP process, he notes.

#### The Ideal IEP Process: What Does It Look Like?

"We talk about collaboration and cross-disciplinary understanding among team members but there is a next level," Dr. Castellani says. "In an ideal world all of the IEP team mem-



bers would have implemented the piece of the IEP from everyone's perspective, often called a trans-disciplinary approach. If the student is getting speech services and occupational services it would be ideal if the teacher and the parent could actually implement that service themselves by having it modeled for them to obtain an understanding of the workings of the process.

"If you are a team member you can watch the process unfold and you can understand it but until you implement it yourself you don't really have an understanding. It's almost like driving a car. When you sit in the car as a passenger while someone else drives the vehicle you don't have a good understanding of how you reached your destination. When you drive the car yourself – knowing of course that no one person can arrange for the implementation of all IEP services – having the understanding gleaned from arranging and implementing a service yourself will enable you as an IEP team member to model it."

Such understanding, he explains, is important when it comes to addressing the AT component of the IEP. "Much AT use

has to do with good positioning, i.e. how a child is situated at the computer, how things are organized, what they are using to access the computer. A teacher is responsible for the educational part of that process, and teachers have to do a lot of positioning and seating without having the training to do it right. The more a teacher does it, the better he/she gets at it.”

### Getting AT into an IEP

Dr. Castellani was asked, What are the best ways to get AT into a child’s IEP? His response, “There’s a legal question that all team members must answer: Was AT considered in the IEP process and is AT needed? Those are check boxes that must be checked. Now, however, IDEA is requiring documentation of the actual AT discussion.



That documentation is most effective when teams write as much as possible, not necessarily about the specific device or program that needs to be used, but instead about the technological approach or capacity of the technology to help a child function. If it’s a screen reader, team members do not necessarily have to name the program, but rather the features of that program that can help a child with his or her IEP goals and objectives. Some districts don’t like to name the program because it ties them to one product when there may be 20 others on the market that could be appropriately used. The idea is to specify which features of a text to speech, for example, that a child needs and then allowing the teacher and school to determine administratively what they have licenses for.”

The documentation of the discussion is critical, he adds, “because after team members have talked about AT they must proceed to supplemental aids and services and supplemental aids and modifications to complete checklists that include preferential seating, for instance, or items needed for a statewide test, a laundry list of items.”

Often, he continues, most of these items are AT related so that there is discrepancy. “Team members may state, ‘Technology was considered. AT is not needed.’ The issue ends there, and then they move to the supplementary services section of the IEP and there is a list of AT that teachers and related services personnel will use, but the IEP team does not recognize items on that list as AT.”

From a year to year perspective, he notes, “if there is no AT discussion documented there is no discussion to build upon. There are so many students to work with. That’s where parental involvement becomes critical because where the teacher may have 20 students on the IEP caseload the parent has one or two. For the parent to act as the communica-

tion bridge and to understand the technology that’s being discussed is very important.”

### Inclusion and the IEP

The final component of the IEP, John points out, is participation in the least restrictive environment. “The push for inclusion means that a student is participating as much as possible in the general education environment, which is the least restrictive.” In that case the coordination of AT becomes even more complicated because now technology is being introduced with which a general educator is likely unfamiliar.

Special educators, he comments, have some understanding of how to adapt and accommodate. But the IDEA least restrictive environment requirement places general ed teachers in a situation where they are being exposed to children and technology with which they have little or no familiarity. “It’s not that they can’t cope with this new situation, it’s that they are unaccustomed to coping with it.”

In this setting, John explains, “coordination of AT becomes even more critical because if a child is now moving between five different classrooms as opposed to being housed in a special ed class, the same reading and writing software the child needs must be installed on computers in each of those classrooms. Beyond that, someone must monitor whether or not that software, once installed, is actually being used.”

Then there is the issue of the student not wanting to use equipment or software that is any different than the child’s peers. “Often children will use their text-to-speech program in their special ed classroom but not in the general ed classroom because no one else is using this odd sounding electronic voice. That’s the most salient least restrictive environment issue we face.”

### Parents, Know Your Rights and Responsibilities

In order to participate fully and effectively in their child’s IEP process, parents must be aware of their rights and responsibilities, Dr. Castellani warns.

“The most important thing for parents to know and understand is their rights and responsibilities in terms of the IEP process. Also, they must be able to stretch the teacher’s awareness of any issues the child is experiencing. I often hear parents say, ‘My child doesn’t do this at home.’ The teacher replies, ‘Well, your child does it at school.’ That is both positive and negative. In other words, the teacher can say, ‘Your child doesn’t cut up in class; she actually does her work.’”

It’s important, whenever possible, he continues, for the parents to get everything in writing. “Not ongoing communication, perhaps, but they should be informed, in writing, about

who the IEP team leader will be, who the coordinator of services will be, and any implementation issues that need to be coordinated between the school, community, and the home.” With AT, the discussion should be documented so that the steps required to obtain the AT are clear to all participants, because the law stipulates that the selection, acquisition, and use must be documented. The use component is where problems of mutual understanding frequently arise.”

Selection is controlled by a few team members and generally, he says, it’s not too difficult for a few individuals to come to a decision about what devices ought to be selected. Acquisition is typically just an administrative process. Use, however, requires true collaboration, which, in turn, requires a high level of communication among team members. “The IEP is prepared just once a year, while a child uses the equipment daily, and that is when the learning occurs. That’s when the child and his/her teachers learn what works well and what doesn’t, what works well in reading as opposed to what works well in math. Consequently, the use piece is often left off the IEP.” Ironically, he explains, use is easily tied to progress. “Reports need to come home. Teachers and others are very accustomed to doing progress reports. Including some connection between how use was identified and how progress is tracked is important.”

Throughout the IEP process, he cautions, parents should maintain an even-tempered demeanor in positive and negative situations. “The idea is to be as motivating as possible and make sure that the tone of communication remains appropriate for the situation.”

### **Equipment Abandonment: ‘It Just Happens’**

The question of equipment abandonment in the IEP process is ever present, Dr. Castellani says. “Unfortunately, equipment abandonment just happens. It seems to be an accepted fact of life as much as AT leaders hate to admit it. It happens with teachers, students, and parents and the general lack of coordination. Equipment gets distributed at the beginning, used during, and then collected at the end of the year and, for whatever reason, the process is not documented. The technology either isn’t being used by those who are supposed to be using it or it’s being used by one person or the responsibility of keeping the equipment up to date and programmed correctly falls on the classroom teacher, or one person rather than the entire team.”

Technology abandonment continues as a major issue, he declares. “especially with highly specialized devices, which you would not think would be the case. The problem comes down to the ability to use the equipment and to understand how it will be used. In some cases the student refuses to use the equipment.”

He has heard of some instances where the parents of a very low functioning child have said, ‘My child doesn’t like the voice output of a specific device or software program.’ You think to yourself, the child is able to express likes and dislikes but I highly doubt that she is saying she doesn’t like the voice. The child is generally hearing that opinion from someone else. The child, parent, or teacher will say they don’t want to use the equipment. Then you start asking why and you hear a suspiciously sophisticated response that you know the child did not come up with him or herself. Or, the equipment just sat there unused after it was purchased. The teacher lacked further support to put the device into use or even if support existed, the parent, teacher or student failed to take ownership of the device.”

What happens to abandoned equipment? Does it languish in a storeroom for the remainder of a school year? What happens to it the following year?

John replies, “Unless there’s a summer program schools will collect all the equipment at year end and put it into the school’s storage cabinet or, if the school is in a large school system, an AT specialist might collect it.” The next year the school literally often starts from scratch. “If there’s no documentation of how the equipment was used, the child is on to another teacher and the equipment is orphaned. The equipment has no history and its use, if any, leaves no footprints unless it’s documented on the IEP and documented in progress. There are instances where that has happened. In high school, for example, a teacher may have the same student for three years and there is a familiarity that is established, enhancing communication.” When a child is in a least restrictive environment with few special ed services, there is almost no communication, he states.

The IEP team as a whole is responsible for documenting, he explains. “Ultimately, the team leader, or whoever coordinates paperwork, is responsible for making sure that the IEP is completed correctly, but every member of the IEP team is responsible for making sure that those decisions and discussions were documented.”

### **Selecting an IEP Team Leader**

The formula for selecting an IEP team leader depends on the nature and severity of a child’s disability, says John. “Often, for AT, an occupational therapist or speech/language pathologist will lead the AT component of the IEP because most devices support mobility or communication.”

Completing the paperwork depends on the school’s structure, he explains. “If the school has a special ed department chair then that individual is responsible for making sure that all IEPs are completed. The team might dole out a caseload for goals and objectives, but that one individual will actually

be responsible for, say, in a mild disabilities program, the 60-70 students who are in it, scheduling meetings and moving the process forward.”

In very small school systems and small schools, however, “there might just be a teacher who’ll fill that role who’s responsible for maybe 10 IEPs. In bigger systems, like Montgomery County Maryland, an AT expert may sit in on the meeting, make recommendations, do the assessments, trials and conduct the follow-up.”

### Considering AT Services

How are AT services --- assessment, evaluation and training -- addressed by the IEP? Responds John, “The AT consideration process should be a very straightforward, quick discussion. There are two approaches: the team has considered AT and is able to make an immediate decision, or more information is needed. Depending on how much information is needed, an assessment is performed on the child.” Parents can request a private consultant to conduct that assessment, but contentiousness can arise over who pays for consultant services, the school or the parents.



If there is an AT expert or office within a county usually the office will conduct the assessment. Once the assessment is completed a series of trials commences and lasts for a designated period of time appropriate to understanding how the AT is being used.

“You’ve considered, you’ve assessed, you have the AT, now trials are run to see where and when the equipment works most effectively. The ultimate evaluation of AT should happen in the monitoring of IEP goals and objectives, to determine what was effective and what wasn’t.”

From a logistics perspective, he adds, “teachers need time to work with one child to collect data on that child and be able to write that up in a coherent manner. Given teacher time constraints it’s often easier for someone else to come in to perform that task.” An assessment of several children is a challenging logistical undertaking. “There might be difficulty in understanding the device, about knowing what to look for with communication. A classroom teacher might need the assistance of an SLP, for example. It depends on where the child is being assessed. If it’s an instructional software program, and the reading teacher, there’s no reason why that teacher can’t do the assessment herself.”

### Training: a Loosely Documented and Delivered AT Service

Although training on equipment and software remain significant issues for school systems, training is one of the most loosely documented and delivered AT services, Dr. Castellani declares. “Often school systems, for the purposes of coordination, train on software packages. Frequently such training is undocumented on an IEP because the instructional or assistive technology department has a training schedule for when training will be offered on specific devices.”

Currently, he continues, “there is so much built into software products that students may not need. The training is on the range of items in the software product and then it’s left up to the classroom teacher to decide what should be turned on or off, what should be used where and when. That’s a tough task to lay on one person if that person lacks experience with the software or device before. Their training becomes a huge issue.”

### The AT World Is Flat

Today and into the near future Dr. Castellani sees an ongoing flattening of technological evolution. “As in Thomas Friedman’s book *The World Is Flat*, equalization is occurring among software programs. AT has reached its plateau as far as what is available is concerned.”

“Not long ago complaints abounded about the fast pace of technology, how fast it was evolving, how quickly products were changing and that it was difficult to keep pace. Now the pace of evolution has flattened out. There may be new pieces to a software product or device, but not a paradigm shift. This will help the field because once school professionals become familiar with a sophisticated program very little will change, just some bells and whistles. This static state should alleviate training issues that have plagued the field for years.”

The only paradigm shift underway in AT, he notes, involves universal design for learning (UDL). “UDL is a shared responsibility and phenomena. Not only is AT involved in UDL, software publishers are creating programs that make teaching easier for the teacher.”

When using an AT tool, he explains, the teacher must adapt everything herself. “If the tool is universally designed then the process of turning equipment on or off becomes that much easier. Through the conversation about what universal design is and who needs to be responsible for it, there’s been a nice learning curve that has occurred over the past four or five years.

“We have not witnessed a lot of change in practice. However, for example, in the state of Maryland we used little

to no language about accessibility or universal design in our state educational technology plan. Recently, however, the state technology director spoke with us about the latest plan, which was littered with accessibility and universal design. This document drives instructional technology. Now we're seeing this language appear there. A movement is developing that says that universal design for learning is not beneficial just for special ed students but for all students."

"What we're seeing is a push toward the convergence of the two technologies: AT and ed tech. Even just a few years ago friends and colleagues of mine and I were discussing the difference between AT and universal design. That discussion has almost disappeared."



The Family Center on Technology & Disability

welcomes the more than 500 disability professionals, teachers, administrators, parents and students who have registered for our 2007 Online Assistive Technology Institute

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**Autism and Assistive Technology  
Transition and Assistive Technology**

Our faculty of AT experts will include:

**Joan Breslin-Larson,  
Minnesota Dept. of Education**

**Joanne Cafiero, Ph.D., Author,  
Meaningful Exchanges for People with Autism**

**Matthew Goodwin, The Groden Center**

**Sean Smith, Ph.D., University of Kansas**

**Brian Wojcik , SEAT Center,  
Illinois State University**

We look forward to a great Institute. See you then!

## RESOURCES

### Articles

#### **Your Child's IEP: Practical and Legal Guidance for Parents By: Peter W.D. Wright and Pamela Darr Wright (2003)**

In the introduction to this article, Peter W.D. Wright and Pamela Darr Wright pose the question, "Why do parents feel so anxious, inadequate and intimidated in school meetings?" They answer with, "Most parents seem to believe that because they are not 'trained educators' – and don't speak 'education jargon' – they have little of value to contribute to discussions about their child's education." This article is meant to help parents learn their roles and their rights in the IEP-writing process and also to assure parents that their role is one of the most important because they know their child better than anyone else at the meeting.

The first section of the article is meant to assure parents that just because they don't understand 'education jargon' and aren't 'trained educators' doesn't mean they do not know what they are talking about. They use the analogy of visiting a doctor's office with your child where the doctor asks for your observations about the child's health. The parents don't have to be medically trained to contribute a vital piece of the puzzle, helping the doctor to diagnose the child. The same is true in the field of education where parental observations and insights are often some of the most important puzzle pieces to putting together a plan for a student.

The remainder of the article looks at various aspects of the IEP and the special education system. The Wrights discuss various ways to evaluate the progress of your child and how to know if that is sufficient progress. They also discuss the various laws and some legal cases that may help parents understand their rights in the whole process. While this article from LD Online is a bit lengthy, it gives parents tons of information so that they can feel comfortable going into and participating in IEP meetings for their child.

<http://www.idonline.org/article/6078>

#### **The IEP Team Members**

**By: Lisa Kupper and Jean Kohanek**

"Parents and teachers as well as other professionals are required by law to be involved in writing a student's IEP." This article from the Reading Rockets website describes the various members of the IEP team and their responsibilities for helping the child. Kupper and Kohanek stress that it is important for every member of the team to work together for the best interest of the child because, "each

person's information adds to the team's understanding of the child and what services the child needs."

The article is organized by each team member's role. Kupper and Kohanek begin with parents, as they are the key members of the IEP team. They know their child best and can describe their child's strengths and needs as well as ideas they may have for the services they believe their child should receive. Teachers are also vital participants, and are the next team members that are discussed. Teachers can give great insight into the curriculum, the child's classroom, and how they think they can best include the child in their classroom so that all of their needs are met. Teachers can include both regular education teachers and special education teachers. Regular education teachers must be included if the child is mainstreamed. Special education teachers have the responsibility for working with the student to carry out the IEP.

After the parents and teachers' roles are discussed, the authors move into "expert areas." An important member of the IEP team is the individual who can interpret what the child's evaluation results mean in terms of designing appropriate instruction. On the team there also must be a school representative who is familiar with the special education services available. In addition to these essential people, the IEP team may also include individuals who have special expertise about the child; for example, an advocate who has been working with the child or a speech-language pathologist.

Finally, there may also be special conditions in place that require the assistance of other professionals. If the student is at a transition age, representatives from transition service agencies can be important contributors to the planning process. The student, themselves, can be members of the IEP team. Many people think it is wise to include the student as soon as possible because they can learn about self-advocacy and they know what plans are in place for them. <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/211>

**Special Needs Technologies: An Administrator's Guide**  
**By: Terry Lankutis**  
**Tech-Learning**

This article is written from the perspective of a team that is responsible for designing and implementing a plan for a child's successful academic career. It describes an IEP team and how that team should work together to devise an IEP and find the technology that will enable the educators and the children to work together to find

appropriate solutions.

The educational process and accountability is stressed throughout the article. The author shares techniques for implementing an IEP evaluation, maintaining information, and designing an AT program that will be successful for both the child and the school. The difference between high-tech and low-tech solutions is explained. Goals for the IEP are discussed and examples of correct terminology are presented. Emphasis is placed on including all members of the IEP team in the decision-making process, especially the student and parents.

The article includes a list of resources for purchasing assistive technology as well as a list of local resources. It also provides information on how to try a device before you actually purchase it. This is a good description of practices that work for children with disabilities. <http://www.techlearning.com/story/show-Article.php?articleID=47204593>

Individualized Education Program: An Overview  
By: Jan Baumel, M.S.  
SchwabLearning

This overview of the IEP process provides a brief summary of what an IEP is and what parents and other IEP team members should know. Baumel begins with defining the IEP as "a written document that's developed for each public school child who's eligible for special education." She proceeds with the legal aspects of writing an IEP and briefly touches on the federal law governing special education, IDEA. The next area focuses on the IEP team members and Baumel lists who should be on the team and what the role of each is. This is a very brief and to-the-point list for quick reference or it can serve as an introduction to the idea of IEP teams. Later in the article, the author specifically focuses on the parents' role as IEP team members.

The remainder of the article focuses the IEP documentation. Baumel looks at what is in the IEP and discusses how to formulate and measure the goals that will be documented. She also looks at special education and related services, which is often the section that assistive technology falls under. Baumel closes with looking at what happens after the IEP, a legal document, is written. <http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.aspx?r=73>

**Practical Steps to Writing Individualized Education Program (IEP) Goals: And Writing Them Well**  
**Contributed By: Dr. Cathy Pratt and Melissa Dubie**  
**Indiana Resource Center for Autism**

“For children on the autism spectrum, the most critical aspect of the educational program is their IEP. The IEP is the document that provides a blueprint for a child’s instructional program and lays the framework for how his time is spent. Because the IEP plays such a critical role, it is essential for parents to identify both long-term and short-term objectives for their child, and that the document is well written.” This article outlines the following six guidelines for the development of well-written goals and objectives:

1. Identify and acknowledge long-term outcomes
2. Make goals meaningful and important
3. Short-term instructional objectives should be observable and measurable
4. Objectives should be context specific
5. Criteria must be written in a manner that is possible to measure
6. Behavioral objectives should be stated in the positive

In addition to these specific ideas, Pratt and Dubie list seven general guidelines to follow when developing the IEP.

<http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/education/IEPgoals.html>

## CHECKLISTS

### IEP Checklist for Parents

**Prepared By: Beth Stevens, Legal Advocacy Team (2000) Washington Protection and Advocacy System**

This checklist for parents covers the three main aspects of the IEP process:

1. IEP Meeting Preparation
2. IEP Meeting and the Development of the IEP
3. IEP Implementation

Under each area, the list gives important information about what should happen during that stage, including what parents need to do. This document is pre-IDEA 2004, but is still applicable and is set up in an accessible fashion for most parents to use as a quick-reference.

[http://www.wpas-rights.org/publications/iep\\_checklist.htm](http://www.wpas-rights.org/publications/iep_checklist.htm)

## BROCHURES

### What Every Teacher Should Know

**By: Anchorage School District (2003)**

This brochure is geared towards the teachers as members of the IEP team. The brochure begins with

a basic introduction of the special education system in general. It talks about IDEA and the concept of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The brochure states, “the concept of FAPE means regular and special education and related services that:

- are provided without charge to the parent – FREE;
- are provided in conformity with an appropriately developed Individualized Education Program (IEP) – APPROPRIATE;
- are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction – PUBLIC; and
- include pre-school, elementary school, and secondary school education that meet the education standards, regulations, and administrative policies and procedures issued by the State Education Agency – EDUCATION.”

After establishing the meaning of FAPE in this unique fashion, the brochure moves into the purpose of the publication, exploring the IEP as a means for the student to receive an appropriate education. Topics of discussion include who is on the IEP team, the role of the general education teacher on the team, student placement, graduation, confidentiality, student intervention teams, and 504 Accommodation Plans. They further discuss the role that the IEP team plays in determining eligibility.

The final section of this brochure looks at the rights and responsibilities of teachers affected by placement decisions, which can be very helpful for teachers who are unfamiliar with the laws that are in place. This section focuses on the responsibility for education of the students, grading procedures, parents’ rights, safety and emergency systems, and what to do when a sudden emergency arises and immediate help is needed.

The brochure closes with how to get help, which is geared specifically to teachers in Alaska. However, many of the entities that are in place in Alaska also exist in other states and may give direction to teachers who are looking for further assistance.

<http://www.asdk12.org/depts/sped/handbook.asp>

## GUIDES

### Your First IEP Meeting

**By: SchwabLearning**

SchwabLearning understands that “participating in your child’s first Individualized Education Program (IEP) can be daunting.” As a way to help parents prepare for their role in the IEP team, they put this guide

together. The guide explains the special vocabulary and procedures of an IEP meeting, the legal rights of the family and parents, and how to make sure IEP goals address your child's learning strengths and needs. In addition to information, SchwabLearning offers tips that parents can use to help their child and family understand learning disabilities. This guide is a compilation of a variety of articles about the IEP, including the following:

- Individualized Education Program (IEP) – An Overview
- Tips for a Successful IEP Meeting
- IEP Planning Form
- Individualized Education Program Goals
- Frequently Used Educational Terms
- Talking with Family about your Child's Learning Disability: Challenges and Rewards
- Talking with Your Elementary School Child about Learning Difficulties
- Ten Top Tips on Talking to your Child about Learning Difficulties

In addition to this compilation of articles, SchwabLearning provides a list of additional IEP resources for the readers of the guide.

[http://www.schwablearning.org/pdfs/e\\_guide\\_iep.pdf?date=11-14-06&status=updated](http://www.schwablearning.org/pdfs/e_guide_iep.pdf?date=11-14-06&status=updated)

## KNOWLEDGE NETWORK MEMBERS

### About Special Kids

About Special Kids, formerly the Indiana Parent Information Network, is



a parent-to-parent organization providing support, information and resources to families of children with disabilities in Indiana. Regional parent liaisons are maintained throughout the state with a central office located in Indianapolis. Parent liaisons are trained and experienced parents of children with special needs who teach families how to anticipate child and family needs, identify family and community resources and access community systems. Liaisons follow up annually with each family that contacts the organization to ensure that progress is being achieved. About Special Kids offers training opportunities to parents on a variety of issues, including the IEP. A \$35 three-hour training session entitled, Preparing your Child's IEP provides information on how to prepare for a case conference and write an IEP. Before parents can complete this training they must go through the Article 7 session, an orientation program on special education and the federal and state laws governing the system. For more information on About Special Kids, please contact:

### About Special Kids

7275 Shadeland Avenue; Suite 1

Indianapolis, IN 46250

Phone: (317) 257-8683

Toll-free: 1-(800) 964-4746

Fax: (317) 251-7488

<http://www.aboutspecialkids.org>

Email: [familynetw@aboutspecialkids.org](mailto:familynetw@aboutspecialkids.org)

### Exceptional Parents Unlimited (EPU)

Founded in 1976 by parents of children with Down syndrome, EPU, a Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), offers information and support to families



of children with a range of special needs. EPU serves more than 3,000 families in three different languages: English, Spanish and Hmong via the following programs and services:

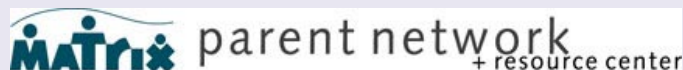
- Family Resource Center
- Infant Family Program
- Learning About Parenting
- Play and Grow Program
- Teen and Young Adults
- Assessment Center for Children

The PTI enables families to access services that include parent to parent support groups, teen and young adult groups, hospital support, advocacy, workshops and trainings, the Family Resource Center Library, community outreach, committees, IEP and Section 504 Clinics. Family Resource Center workshop topics include Turning Dreams into Goals, IEP, which focuses on ways that the IEP process can be realistically implemented. This workshop is offered in 2-6-hour sessions.

The EPU Family Resource Center Library houses books, articles and videotapes on topics related to parenting children with special needs. Materials at the library are available in English and Spanish. Resources gathered from other organizations are categorized by topic for easy access. Their IEP Resource section is divided into the following groups: IEP parent resources in English, Spanish, and Hmong; functional behavior assessments, 504 plans, and assistive technology. For more information on EPU, please contact:

Exceptional Parents Unlimited  
4440 North First Street  
Fresno, CA 93726  
Phone: (559) 229-2000; (559) 225-6059 (TTY)  
Fax: (559) 229-2956  
<http://www.exceptionalparents.org>  
Contact: [Marion M. Karion](mailto:Marion.M.Karion)  
Email: [info@exceptionalparents.org](mailto:info@exceptionalparents.org)

### Matrix Parent Network and Resource Center – Marin County



The Matrix Parent Network in California's Marin County aids families in understanding and accessing the systems that serve them. Run by parents of children with special needs, Matrix responds to an annual average of over 7,000 requests for information or assistance from more than 1,000 families and professionals. Matrix services are available to families in Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma Counties. These services include a toll-free HELP Line, individual support and technical assistance, trainings on special education and school services, direction to appropriate early intervention and health care services, support groups for families across age groups and disabilities and a comprehensive resource library of family and disability-related materials. Matrix Parent Network workshops provide training on special education and school services. Workshops are available in each geographical area

served by Matrix. Upcoming workshop topics include: How to be a Good Advocate for Your Child; Features of an IEP, Assessments; and Transition. The Matrix Network library, located in North Bay, contains 1,500 books, journals and audio visual materials. For more information on Matrix, please contact:

Matrix  
94 Galli Drive, Suite C  
Novato, CA 94949  
Phone: (415) 884-3535; (800) 578-2592 (toll free)  
Fax: (415) 884-3555  
<http://www.matrixparents.org>  
Contact: Nora Thompson  
Email: [info@matrixparents.org](mailto:info@matrixparents.org)

### National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) supplies information to the nation about children and youth with disabilities and the special education system, including IDEA and No Child Left Behind. NICHCY disseminates research-based information on effective practices for children with disabilities. Services are available to families, educators, administrators, journalists, students and others. Information is supplied in multiple formats. A bilingual website includes information on the following:



- Specific disabilities
- Early intervention services for infants and toddlers
- Special education and related services for children in school
- Research on effective educational practices
- Resources and connections in every state
- IEPs
- Parent materials
- Disability organizations
- Professional associations
- Education rights and what the law requires
- Transition to adult life

NICHCY produces many publications on these and other topics, which can be downloaded from their website. Publications are also available in print upon request. In addition to its bilingual website, the organization maintains a toll-free number that connects callers to bilingual services and a team of research and information specialists who are available to discuss individual questions and concerns. Information specialists are

available to interact with callers in English and Spanish. For more information on NICHCY, please contact:

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)

P.O. Box 1492

Washington, DC 20013

Phone: 1-(800) 695-0285 (V/TTY)

Fax: (202) 884-8441

<http://www.nichcy.org>

Email: [nichcy@aed.org](mailto:nichcy@aed.org)

### Parents Educating Parents and Professionals for All Children (PEPPAC)

A PTI, PEPPAC assists children with disabilities ages 3–22 throughout the state of Georgia. The organization provides informative



and educational trainings to parents and professionals which aid them in navigating the state's special education system. Supports include printed information on disability topics, information on IDEA and methods and skills to establish productive relationships with professionals, a workshop training program, a resource center library, knowledgeable staff and referrals and personal assistance. PEPPAC offers support and advice on the IEP process and workshops for parents and professionals on IDEA, IEPs, communication, transition, behavioral intervention and other topics upon request. All of these workshops are available at no cost. For more information on PEPPAC, please contact:

Parents Education Parents and Professionals for All Children (PEPPAC)

P.O. Box 5128

Douglasville, GA 30154

Phone: (770) 577-7771

Toll-free (Georgia): 1-(800) 322-7065

Fax: (770) 577-7774

<http://www.peppinc.org/Projects/Peppac/Overview/tabid/71/Default.aspx>

Contact: Linda Shepard, CEO

Email: [peppinc@peppinc.org](mailto:peppinc@peppinc.org)

### Pathfinder Parent Training and Information Center

A Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), Pathfinder provides information and referral services to North Dakotans.



The center's statewide special education and early childhood resource library consists of books, tapes, videos and resource materials from na-

tional clearinghouses and other professional sources. Pathfinder also provides individual and group training sessions on aspects of IDEA 2004. A limited number of teleconferenced small-group training sessions and regional training sessions are offered annually. Training topics include: free and appropriate public educations, parent and student involvement, procedural safeguards, appropriate evaluations, IEPs, least restrictive environments, transition and mediation. For more information on Pathfinder, please contact:

Pathfinder Parent Training and Information Center  
1600 2nd Avenue, SW  
Suite 30

Minot, ND 58701

Phone: (701) 837-7500

Toll-free: 1-(800) 245-5840

Fax: (701) 837-7548

<http://www.ndpti.com/pti/path.html>

Email: [ndpath01@srt.com](mailto:ndpath01@srt.com)

### Schwab Foundation for Learning



Schwab Learning serves children K-12 with learning or attention problems. The foundation supports parents by providing them with research-based information. Schwab delivers services through three main avenues: its website, [sparktop.org](http://sparktop.org), and outreach and community services.

The SchwabLearning.org website features information on managing home, family and school life for a child's benefit. Available on the website, Schwab Foundation publications cover issues that include IEPs, assistive technology and learning disabilities. SparkTop.org content is geared for children ages 8 – 12 with learning disabilities and provides information and peer support in an interactive environment. Schwab Foundation outreach and community services for parents and professional groups include educational workshops, seminars, presentations, exhibits and special projects. For more information on Schwab Foundation for Learning, please contact:

Schwab Foundation for Learning

1650 S. Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300

San Mateo, CA 94402

Phone: (650) 655-2410

Fax: (650) 655-2411

<http://www.schwablearning.org>

### Special Kids Inc. (SKI)

Special Kids Inc. is a Community Parents Resource Center funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. SKI provides training, events and consultations, including: advocacy, training, one-on-one consultations, support groups and mentors. Advocacy efforts include training on laws and regulations affecting special education programs in the Houston Independent School District. SKI training helps parents and families develop IEPs, communicate with teachers and navigate the special education system. SKI also provides training opportunities for educators and surrogate parents. For more information on SKI, please contact:



Special Kids, Inc. (SKI)

P.O. Box 266958

Houston, TX 77207-6958

Phone: (713) 734-5355

Fax: (713) 643-6291

<http://www.specialkidsinc.org>

Contact: Rose Ferguson, Director

Email: [specialkidsinc@yahoo.com](mailto:specialkidsinc@yahoo.com)

### Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)



In providing information, support, training and advocacy services to New Jersey parents of children with disabilities, SPAN information specialists assist parents, educators and service providers in obtaining appropriate education and health care services for children. These specialists also pass on information through publications that address education, law and advocacy, school reform and health and disability issues. SPAN's annual conference for parents and educators provides workshops, networking opportunities and a forum for exchanging ideas and information. Most information is offered in both Spanish and English. The SPAN website serves as a hub for all of the organization's information and news. SPAN's training program focuses on family and staff development activities. Workshops and seminars aid parents and educators in obtaining educational services for children. Participating parents gain the knowledge and skills necessary to assume leadership and advisory roles at the state, district and school levels. SPAN is also the

Parent Training and Information Center for the state of New Jersey. As a PTI, SPAN offers the following advocacy workshops for parents and professionals:

- Basic Rights
- Transition to Preschool
- Early Intervention
- IEP
- LRE/Inclusion
- Positive Behavior Supports
- Transition to Adult Life
- Section 503
- Parent/Professional Collaboration
- School Reform

For more information on SPAN, please contact:

Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)

35 Halsey Street, 4th Floor

Newark, NJ 07102

Phone: (973) 642-8100; (800) 654-4426 (toll free)

Fax: (973) 642-8080

<http://www.spannj.org>

Email: [span@spannj.org](mailto:span@spannj.org)

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Family Center  
on Technology  
and Disability

[www.fctd.info](http://www.fctd.info)

### Family Center on Technology and Disability

1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20009

Phone 202-884-8068

Fax (202) 884-8441

[fctd@aed.org](mailto:fctd@aed.org)

[www.fctd.info](http://www.fctd.info)