Technical Assistance Bulletin

First Printed: September 1999

Revised: June 2002

from the Missouri Department of
Elementary & Secondary Education,
Special Education Compliance Section

Issues *in* EDUCATION

Please copy and route to your staff

IDEA '97: The Role of General Educators

Linking to the General Education Curriculum and Participation in State- and District-wide Assessment

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is intended to encourage greater access for students with disabilities to the general education curriculum, as well as a greater level of participation in the IEP decision-making process by parents, students, and regular educators.

IEP Team Participants

- The parents of the child
- At least one regular education teacher who is or may be responsible for implementing a portion of the IEP of the child (if the child is or may be participating in the regular education environment). If the student has more than one regular education teacher, the local educational agency (LEA) may designate which regular education teacher will participate.

  NOTE - After the initial IEP meeting, the team may discuss whether the general education teacher's participation is necessary in subsequent meetings.
- At least one special education teacher of the child, or if appropriate, at least one special education provider of the child.
- A representative of the public agency who is qualified to provide or supervise the provisions of specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities. The representative must be: 1) knowledgeable about the general curriculum; and 2) knowledgeable about availability of resources and able to commit the resources of the agency.
- A person to interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results (This may be a member of the team already described above.) If a person is serving in 2 or more roles on the IEP team, each role must be documented on the IEP.
- At the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including services personnel as appropriate. The determination of the knowledge or special expertise of any individual shall be made by the party (parents or public agency) who invited the individual to be a member of the IEP team;
- The child, beginning at age 14, or younger, if appropriate.

IDEA '97 provides a new and heightened emphasis on improving educational results for students with disabilities, including provisions which ensure that these students:

1. have meaningful access to the general curriculum through improvements to the individualized education program (IEP), and
2. are included in general education reform efforts related to accountability and high expectations, which focus on improved teaching and learning.

As with any major change in policy or practice, many questions arise. This technical assistance bulletin has been developed to answer these questions:

- What is the role of the general education teacher in the education of students with disabilities?
- How do educators link IEP goals and objectives to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities?
- How do educators help prepare students with disabilities to participate in state- and district-wide assessment?
- How do educators determine when accommodations are necessary for students with disabilities to participate in state- and district-wide assessments?

The Changing Role of the General Educator

Prior to IDEA '97, a student's teacher had been required to be a member of the IEP team, but either the student's general OR special education teacher could attend. With IDEA '97, a general educator must be included if the student "is or may be participating in the general education environment."

The general educator now becomes a vital member of the IEP team as the team looks at a student's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. Not only are general educators now required participants in the IEP process, they also play an active role in decisions about what interventions, strategies, and school personnel are needed to assist and support the student in succeeding in the general education environment.

The general educator can provide pertinent data on the student's behavioral and academic progress. They also provide the team with:

- Information about class-wide academic and behavioral expectations
- How the student performs within the general education context
- Observations and data about how the student interacts with his/her peers
- A description of the pace at which the class as a whole is progressing through the curriculum
- Annotations of how other students interact with the student with disabilities
- A snapshot of the social dynamics of the class
- An understanding of the strategies and approaches used for teaching the class as a whole (Council for Exceptional Children, 1999)

The general educator, as a member of the IEP team, must participate in the problem-solving and decision-making discussions regarding the student's involvement in the general education environment and his or her progress in the general education curriculum. The general educator need not participate in discussions about portions of the student's IEP which he or she will not be responsible for implementing. To be effective team members, both general and special educators will need to utilize skills including:

- How to communicate effectively
- How to work as a team
- How to observe and record behaviors objectively
- How to focus on student achievement and report progress positively
- How to move out of a "comfort zone" of instruction and try something different and new
- When and how to ask for assistance (Council for Exceptional Children, 1999)

The IEP team develops an appropriate individualized education program for a specific student, given the information known at that time. It is a process of integrating the sometimes diverse perspectives of teachers, parents, students, school officials, and others to focus on the unique needs of the student.

IDEA '97 places great emphasis on the necessity of collaboration among general educators, special educators, parents, and others. Utilizing the expertise of both special and general educators combined with greater access to the general education curriculum and effective instructional practices and high standards, many students with disabilities will improve their academic performance.

Linking General Education Curriculum to IDEA '97

IDEA '97 reflects the concept that special education services for the majority of students with disabilities should not be a separate place for learning, but a set of services and supports designed to help individuals be involved and progress in the general education curriculum and environment. The question is, "What is needed to meet the educational needs of the individual student so he or she will succeed within the general education curriculum?"

Standards-based school reform efforts have prompted Missouri and other states to develop educational standards which promote high expectations for all students. IEPs should be linked to these standards and the general education curriculum with the accommodations and adaptations necessary to facilitate the student's success in the general curriculum. For students who have more severe disabilities, functional modifications of the Show-Me Standards may be necessary. But all students can work toward the Show-Me Standards. There is now an alternate curriculum framework for students who need a functional curriculum.

Kukic and Schrag (1998) promote two IEP formats which utilize state standards, standards-based IEPs, and standards-referenced IEPs:

General education teachers participating in the education of a student with disabilities should ask themselves:

1. What are the student's strengths?
2. Is the student participating in state and local assessments? If yes, how is he/she faring? Are accommodations needed?
3. What kinds of goals and benchmarks might be important for this student?
4. What learning and instructional strategies and environments work best for this student?
5. What kind of support or help might be important for the student?
6. What kind of support would help me assist this student?
7. What kind of assistance or information could the family and student provide?
8. Does the student have any behavior issues we should be addressing (Council for Exceptional Children, 1999)?

Other issues of interest include:

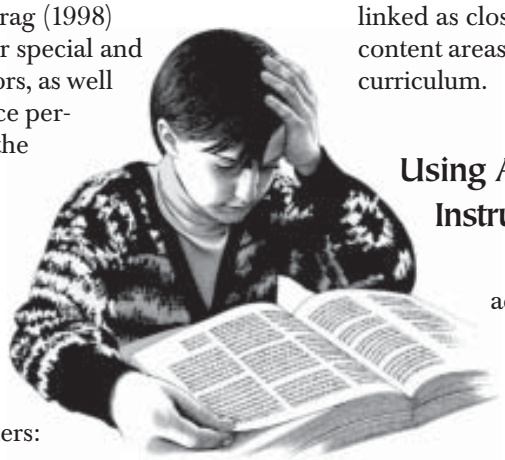
9. What are the expectations for other students this age who are learning our district curriculum?
10. Where is this student functioning when compared to our local educational standards and other non-disabled peers of the same age?

1. *Standards-based IEPs* – In this format, all instructional activities are aimed specifically to a student's achievement of standards. The student's learning needs are prioritized and matched to the grade-level objectives for the standards. In Missouri, most IEPs will be based on the Show-Me Standards.
2. *Standards-referenced IEPs* – After identifying the student's unique needs and challenges from a variety of sources, the IEP team then identifies the standards to which the needs and challenges relate. There are very few needs and challenges of students without a reference in the standards. For these students, the alternate Show-Me Frameworks will be the reference for their IEPs.

The district-wide curriculum includes learner outcomes and articulation of the content across grade levels. It reflects the skills, attitudes, and knowledge determined to be most important for success by the community. Teachers use the key assessment indicators and benchmarks to measure student learning within the school-wide or district-wide curriculum.

Instead of a separate curriculum targeting instructional deficiencies for students with disabilities, all students should participate in the general education curriculum. The general education curriculum directs the what, when, why, and how of teaching. The where, or location within the least restrictive environment, should be determined only after the other four questions (what, when, why, and how) have been addressed by the IEP team in the development of the educational plan (Kukic & Schrag, 1998).

Kukic & Schrag (1998) suggest ways for special and general educators, as well as related service personnel such as the speech and language pathologist, to supplement or adapt the general curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners:



- ❖ Supplement or adapt the general education curriculum by adding content enabling students to achieve a deeper understanding or higher level of mastery than is called for in the curriculum guide.
- ❖ Infuse content from an alternative curriculum into instruction to give students the prerequisite skills they lack for success in the general curriculum.
- ❖ Select fewer objectives, deleting those for which the student lacks necessary prerequisite skills.
- ❖ Teach parts of objectives, or steps leading up to mastery of certain objectives.
- ❖ Hold all students accountable for the same objectives, but vary instructional approaches or alter assessment methods to reflect student strengths and compensate for weaknesses.
- ❖ Select objectives from an earlier grade or level within the curriculum.
- ❖ Supplement the general education curriculum with other instructional components such as Braille instruction, sign language, orientation and mobility training.
- ❖ Accommodate for skills that the student does not have and is not likely to quickly acquire.
- ❖ Replace the general curriculum with an alternative curriculum that better meets the needs of students with severe disabilities. This curriculum might be composed of functional academics and daily living skills. The alternative curriculum should be linked as closely as possible to the content areas of the general education curriculum.

Using Accommodations in Instructional Assessment

The use of accommodations by students with disabilities during instruction and assessment minimizes the impact of a student's disability in his/her learning and performance. The goal in using accommodations is to give students with disabilities an equal opportunity or "level the playing field," not to give these students an unfair advantage over other students.

The 1997 Amendments to IDEA require that IEP teams discuss and include in the IEP a statement of any individual accommodations in administration of state- and district-wide assessments of student achievement that are needed to allow a student with a disability to participate in the assessment. If the IEP team determines the child will not participate in the state- or district- wide assessment, the IEP must include a statement of why the assessment is not appropriate and how the student will be assessed.

Ways for students to participate in the state Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) include:

- ❖ Take MAP assessments under standard conditions
- ❖ Take MAP assessments with accommodations
- ❖ Take MAP-Alternate (MAP-A)

The majority of students with disabilities will participate either under standard conditions or with necessary accommodations. No more than 2% of a district's total population are expected to be eligible for the MAP-A assessment. This decision will be based upon the focus of the student's curriculum and life goals, current level of functioning, and learning characteristics; and not on a category of disability, or placement, or the percentage of time a student spends in the general education classroom. The decision regarding student participation in assessments is made by the IEP team and must be documented in the IEP.

Accommodations used in the instructional process should be strongly considered by the IEP team for use during a state- or district-wide assessment. Accommodations are allowed on all three parts of the MAP. However, the multiple choice section (*Terra Nova*) is a timed, norm-referenced test that must be administered under "standard" conditions in order to produce a norm-referenced score.

Accommodations in Assessment

As a rule, an accommodation should be allowed if it:

- Is used routinely by the student in the instructional environment
- Is based on the student's instructional need, not benefit
- Doesn't give students with disabilities an advantage over other students
- Doesn't change the nature of what is being tested
- Cannot threaten test security or the integrity of the test

The MAP specifies four categories of accommodations that IEP teams may consider. These are listed in the examiner's manual for each MAP assessment. The four categories and some examples are:

1. *Administration* – Changes in how an assessment is administered which may include reading the assessment, large print, Braille editions, signing, audiotapes, assistive devices, and others.
2. *Timing* – Changes in duration, timing, or scheduling of an assessment, which may include extended time or short, multiple sessions.
3. *Response* – Changes in the way students are expected to respond to assessment materials, which may mean use of a word processor, dictation to a scribe, pointing, use of a Brailler, calculator, abacus, oral responses, and others.
4. *Setting* – Changes in the location or physical environment in which an assessment is administered, which may include individual or small groups, special furniture or lighting, and others.

Because accommodations were not allowed for the group of students on which the *Terra Nova* was normed, the use of accommodations on the *Terra Nova* invalidates a student's norm-referenced scores.

The scores of students with disabilities who use accommodations when taking the *Terra Nova* portion of the MAP subject area assessments only count toward the development of an achievement level score for the individual student and the district.

For some students, IEP teams will determine it is not appropriate for them to participate in MAP content area general assessments, even with accommodations. For these students, the MAP-Alternate (MAP-A) assessment will be used. The MAP-A is based on alternate curriculum frameworks that are aligned to the Show-Me Standards in a functional context. The MAP-A is a portfolio assessment process that will be used to assess students at ages 9, 13, and 17. This aligns with elementary, middle, and high school assessments of the MAP subject assessment. A portfolio could be an appropriate alternate assessment tool for measuring progress in the general education curriculum on district-wide assessments.

Performance and progress of all students in the general education curriculum and on the Show-Me Standards are critical indicators of their educational outcomes and lifelong achievement. We must "level the playing field" and provide students with disabilities opportunities to learn and demonstrate what they know and can do. It takes a collaborative team of general educators, special educators, parents, and administrators coming together to develop an effective plan to educate students with diverse learning needs.

Resources:

Council for Exceptional Children. (1998). *IDEA 1997: Let's make it work.* Reston,VA: author.

Council for Exceptional Children. (1999). *The IEP team guide.* Reston,VA: author.

Edgley, M. (1997). *Including students with disabilities in the Missouri assessment program: Information packet.* [On-Line]. Available: www.coe.missouri.edu/~mocise/pubs/map/toc.htm.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Amendments of 1997 and Final Regulations. (1999, March). [On-line]. Available: www.ideapractices.org/lawandregs.htm.

Kukic, S., & Schrag, J. (1998). *IEP connections: For a dynamic, living and practical process.* Longmont, CO: Sopris

The development and printing of this material was supported entirely by federal funds appropriated in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This bulletin will be distributed periodically from the Division of Special Education, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, PO Box 480, Jefferson City, MO 65102; fax [573] 526=4404, phone (573) 751-0699. This bulletin is made possible under contract by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, which complies with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Civil Rights Act of 1991, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Services are provided without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, or physical or mental disability. If you have needs as addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act and need this publication in an alternative format, notify the Center for Innovations in Special Education at (573) 884-7275, (800) 976-CISE (MO only), or Relay MO (800) 735-2966 (TDD). Efforts will be made to accommodate your needs.