Developing an Effective Individual Education Plan

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim of Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Underlying the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methods</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Delimitations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 EXAMINATION OF GOVERNMENT POLICY</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification and Assessment</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Support and Implementation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and Reporting</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Policy</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Teacher Involvement in IEPs</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Involvement in IEPs</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement in IEPs</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Efficient IEPs</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful Goals for IEPs</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1

Introduction

The needs of special education students have become a major issue in school districts in British Columbia. Funding limits, teacher expertise and questions on how to identify students in need have created a complex equation that individual districts are wrestling to understand and adapt to their needs. Identifying students and developing a course of action involves a wide range of plans and players.

The Individual Education Plan or IEP is the instrument used to address the needs of students with disabilities. At Kwayhquitlum Middle School and other Coquitlam District Middle Schools the Individual Education Plan is mandated by the Province of British Columbia Ministry of Education in: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines (2006). The document breaks the process into the following components: identification and assessment, planning, program support and implementation, evaluation and reporting.

Aim of Study

Intimate involvement in the IEP process as a Special Education Teacher, has led to questioning its effectiveness. This paper will identify important components for an effective IEP process. This paper will argue that the B.C. Ministry of Education document is not being implemented effectively. This argument suggests changes need to be made to the IEP process. To address the need for change, important components for an
Developing an Effective Individual Education Plan

Effective IEP process will be examined. This examination will isolate five areas which assist in developing an effective IEP process.

**Problems Underlying the Study**

Individual Education Plans are extremely important documents. Kamens (2004) relates that, “The individualized education program is the foundation of instruction for individuals with disabilities” (p.76). If the IEP is the foundation for instruction of individuals with disabilities, it should be developed in an effective manner. Whether or not this is happening, is open to debate. Varied practices and standards of IEPs appear to be the norm. Pretti-Frontczak (2000) states that, “Many studies report that IEP goals and objectives tend to be poorly written and question the individualized nature of the IEP” (p.92). It is important, therefore, that we are able to find ways to improve the quality of the IEP. We need to look at ways ensure that certain standards are met when writing IEPs. This paper elucidates the development of an effective IEP process.

**Definitions**

This section will include major definitions. Other educational definitions will be explained within the paper.

**Individual Education Plan**

The B.C. Ministry of Education (2006) defines the Individual Education Plan or IEP as, “A documented plan developed for a student with special needs that describes individualized goals, adaptations, modifications, services to be provided, and includes measures for tracking achievement” (p.v).
School-based Team

The school-based team is defined by the B.C. Ministry of Education (2006, p.vi), as:

An ongoing team of school-based personnel which has a formal role to play as a problem-solving unit in assisting classroom teachers to develop and implement instructional and/or management strategies and to co-ordinate support resources for students with special needs within the school.

Transition Planning

Preparation for students for major changes in their academic life is defined by the B.C. Ministry of Education (2006 p.vi) as:

…preparation, implementation and evaluation required to enable students to make major transitions during their lives – from home or pre-school to school; from class to class; from school to school; from school district to school district; and from school to post-secondary, community or work situations.

Adaptations

Adaptations to programming are defined by B.C. Ministry of Education (2006 p.v) as:

An education program with adaptations retains the learning outcomes of the regular curriculum, and is provided so the student can participate in the program. Adaptations are teaching and assessment strategies made to accommodate a student’s special needs, and may include alternate formats (e.g., Braille, books-on-tape), instructional strategies (e.g., use of interpreters, visual cues and aids) and assessment procedures (e.g., oral exams, additional time, assistive technologies). Students with education programs that include adaptations are assessed using the standards for the course/program and can receive credit toward a Dogwood certificate for their work.
Modifications

The B.C. Ministry of Education (2006 p.vi) defines a modification as:

A modified educational program has learning outcomes that are substantially different from the regular curriculum, and specifically selected to meet the student's special needs. For example, a Grade 9 student in a modified math program could be focusing on functional computational skills in the context of handling money and personal budgeting. Or, in language arts, a Grade 5 student could be working on recognizing common signs and using the phone. In these examples, the learning outcomes are substantially different from those of the curriculum for most other students. To enable achievement, a student's program may include some courses that are modified and others that have adaptations.

Significance of the Study

The Individual Education Plan has been a contentious document from the outset. There have always been numerous complaints about the IEP and its implementation. McLaughlin (1995) lists some of the early concerns as: time needed to fulfill the obligations of the document; inclusion of general educators; inclusion of guardians; and inclusion of outside agencies in planning. These issues continue to be at the forefront today. Time becomes a factor in doing an effective job. It is important, therefore, to carefully identify how to create documents both efficiently and effectively. To be efficient one must determine the components of the IEP which are most necessary. This paper will assist in this determination.
**Research Methods**

To help examine the criteria for an effective IEP process, five questions will be developed which are driven by relevant research and literature. Hopefully, these questions will lead authors of Individual Education Plans to a thoughtful examination of their practices. Results from the survey may be important to initiate change to deficient areas of the process.

The paper will include the following sections:

A) An examination of the mandated government policy and how it has been put into practice at Kwayhquitlum Middle School.

B) An examination of the literature of five criteria suggested for an effective IEP process.

C) Use the literature review as a basis for developing five questions that case managers may use for reflecting on their IEP practices.

D) Conclusions about the criteria for an effective IEP process.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

This paper takes on a thorough examination of the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2006) document, paying particular attention to the area of IEP planning. As a student services teacher, this is the area of the IEP which appeared to have the most potential for creating effective change in practices. It follows that the literature review pertains specifically to five IEP planning practices and does not encompass all areas of the IEP.
Chapter 2

**Examination of Government Policy**

The following chapter is an examination of the British Columbia Ministry of Education document, A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines (2006). This document provides the foundation for special education practices in British Columbia. The following section will look critically at four area of the document tied to development of the IEP. These sections are: identification and assessment; planning; program support and implementation and evaluation and reporting.

According to the B.C. Ministry of Education (2006), “Students with special needs are defined as those who have disabilities of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioral nature, or who have exceptional gifts or talents” (p.1). These students are broken into funding categories depending on their needs. There are essentially four categories in which students are placed. These categories are related to need and funding. A basic financial allocation is provided for student with severe learning disabilities, giftedness, mild intellectual disabilities and moderate behavioural supports. This allocation is based on a percentage of the school population. Beyond these needs there are three tiers of students who are funded. The first tier includes students who are dependent handicapped or deaf/blind. The school district is supported with an additional $32 000 per student from the government. The second tier provides students with moderate to profound intellectual disabilities, physically disabled or chronic health
impaired, physically impaired, deaf/hearing impaired and autism spectrum disorder with an additional $16,000 of funding per student. Students funded in third tier need intensive behavioural interventions or have a serious mental illness. Level three is funded with $8,000 per student.

**Identification and Assessment**

How are students identified, and placed in these categories? In many cases, observable disabilities allow students to be identified prior to starting school. Students who have not been identified enter into a process where they are hopefully identified early in their educational life. Typically a student is identified through parental or teacher concerns as a candidate for further assessment. The time it takes to identify students may vary depending on the severity of the disability. Concerns are normally discussed with parents and special education teachers, and this typically starts the process. Each school has a school based team which is comprised of the school counselor, administration and special education teachers. Information about the student is gathered through examination of the student’s file, discussions with prior teachers and counselors, or through current teachers. This information is brought to a school based team meeting. This information provides the basis for starting to make a plan to address the student’s needs. Academic concerns often lead to further testing. Behavioral concerns may lead to medical assessments. The school base team can provide: “Extended consultation on possible classroom strategies; planning for and coordination of services for the student; access to additional school, district, community or regional services and planning for and coordination of services within the school” (B.C. Ministry of Education 2006, p.14).
A school based team meeting is used to develop a plan to address the student’s needs. Although, not always the case, this meeting would be the starting point for a student to be ministry designated and necessitating an IEP. Academic and learning concerns are often directed towards further testing and examination of school history. In Coquitlam School District 43, standardized testing where results show a three year discrepancy between grade and achievement level are necessary for students to receive further assessment. The initial testing tool most often used is the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement Two or KTEA Two. The KTEA Two Brief Form, gives an assessment of reading, which is broken into two sections, recognition and comprehension, math principles and writing. If a student in grade eight received a grade equivalent score of five or less, the district psychologist will make a decision regarding further assessment. If testing shows this variation and the psychologist deems it necessary, they will provide the student with a psycho-educational test, typically comprised of the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children (Fourth Edition) and the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (Second Edition.). “Students with learning disabilities demonstrate at least average ability; on an individual assessment of cognitive ability, but demonstrate a significant weakness in one or more cognitive processes (perception, memory, attention, receptive or expressive language abilities and visual-spatial abilities) relative to overall intellectual functioning” (B.C. Ministry of Education 2006, p. 47). Student categorized as having a mild intellectual disability have intellectual capabilities which fall two to three standard deviations below the norm, and moderate to profound intellectual disabilities are students
whose intellectual capabilities are three or more standard deviations below the norm, (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006).

There are a number of issues that arise with this process. School based teams are made up of student services teachers, youth worker, counsellor and administrator who have the student’s best interest in mind, however are not necessarily experts in identification of disabilities. Our school has seven teachers who provide service in special education. Of those seven teachers, three have taken additional coursework to supplement their general teaching certificates. The student services teachers who present the standardized testing are not always familiar with the testing protocols. In our school, these tests are often given by teachers who haven’t received any in-service training. This could lead to inconsistent or incorrect test results. Kaufman & Kaufman (2005), “Qualified examiners have training in and understanding of the principles of test administration, including establishing and maintaining rapport, following standardized testing procedures, and statistical concepts related to scoring and interpreting results” (p vii). Although in-service sessions on testing are available through our district, only two of the seven staff from our school who deliver and score this assessment have attended this workshop. Severe learning disabilities may be overlooked by inexperienced or experienced teachers, and assessed as students who are underachieving academically. The learning disability may not be recognized at an early stage in the student’s academic life. A large degree of responsibility is being placed on the school based team to provide the proper direction for the student. Uncertainty regarding students needs often leads to further testing. To
become a funded student and receive supports in the Coquitlam School District, a psycho-educational exam is mandatory. District psychologists who are typically understaffed, are the only personnel qualified to present and assess these exams. Funding limitations of district psychologists has resulted long waits for testing. Coquitlam School District attempts to provide an early diagnosed student with intellectual disabilities, three assessments during his school life. This would mean an early assessment, followed by a middle school and high school assessment. In middle school all of the resources are devoted to re-testing funded students in preparation for accommodations needed for government high school exams. District psychologists therefore, are continually trying to clear the backlog of students who necessitate re-testing. This may leave students who may have fallen through the cracks undiagnosed. This is hardly a perfect system.

Identification and assessment of gifted students is the responsibility of the student’s home school. To be funded as a gifted student, one must show the ability to meet some components of a list of varied criteria. Included in the list of criteria are:

Teacher observations including anecdotal records, checklists and inventories; records of students achievements including assignments, portfolios, grades and outstanding talents, interests and accomplishments; nominations by educators, parents or peers; interviews of parents or students; and formal assessments of cognitive ability, achievement, aptitude and creativity. (B.C. Minstry of Education 2005, p.51)

This long and varied list of criteria has created larger than expected gifted classes. Gifted programs are funded on a percentage basis of the school population. The number of
students who are able to participate in the program often exceeds the level of funding. When districts staff by quotas of students expected in programs, this creates understaffing issues which affect the IEP process. In addition, students who do not meet criteria for giftedness are often added to gifted classes as enrichment students. An enrichment student is someone who doesn’t meet the criteria for giftedness, but shows abilities or interests beyond the regular class focus. The multitude of evolving definitions of giftedness has lead to school districts creating criteria of giftedness which includes a greater percentage of the school population than is allotted for financially. Giftedness is no longer identified strictly by intelligence. “The gifted and talented are clearly a very heterogeneous set of persons and it is this multidimensional heterogeneity which may preclude a comprehensive theory.” Monks, Heller & Passow 2000, p.841).

Identification of students with behavioural needs or mental illness may start with the class teacher, although some of these students may have been assessed or treated by professionals in the community prior to starting school. If a teacher identifies a behavioural concern, the teacher would begin by applying strategies to attempt to rectify the problem. Persistent inappropriate behaviour would lead to a parent meeting. This meeting would provide the teacher and guardians with further information to structure behavioural supports within the class and home. If these supports don’t derive positive results the teacher would share the student concerns at school based team meeting. The information shared by the teacher would provide the school based team with the information to decide whether to identify the student in the moderate behaviour category, or whether further assessment is necessary. Further assessment may include involve
Developing an Effective Individual Education Plan

requesting a medical assessment from the family doctor, or requesting support services from the district level for further evaluation. Support services would include asking for testing from the district psychologist, involving the district behavioural support team to provide additional assessment or gathering information from outside agencies which may have had involvement with the student. Further assessment should:

Analyze the students functional behaviour’s in various settings with variety of people; integrate information from different aspects of a student’s life; focus on strengths as well as needs; rule out other conditions which may be precipitating or contributing to the behaviour; clarify the characteristics of the behaviour disorder or mental illness; address the possibility of other medical or health impairments; contribute to the process of planning and evaluating the student’s educational program. (B.C. Ministry of Education 2006, p.56)

Students who fall in the intensive behaviour category because of mental illness are often identified prior to the start of school. Behavioural concerns and some mental illness may not be identified until later in the student’s academic life. There are two behaviour categories which are funded within our school district. One category discussed above is the intensive behaviour or mental illness, and the other category is referred to as moderate behaviour. Placement of the student in either the moderate behaviour or intensive behaviour category raises issues which need examination. The intensive behaviour category provides greater funding than the moderate behaviour category. This often leads to an attempt by districts or school administration to place students in the intensive category if the student can fit the criteria, even if the student could be placed suitably in to the moderate behaviour category. The intensive behaviour category
necessitates the student has involvement with an outside agency, i.e. social services or counselling. Writing and implementing an IEP for students in this category is substantially more detailed and time consuming than an IEP for the moderate behaviour category. One reason for this is that it is required by the ministry that, “Both plan and delivery of service is coordinated with community service provider or agency. It is not enough that another agency or ministry is involved” (B.C. Ministry of Education 2006, p.60). This means the responsibility of contacting agencies and creating meeting times are incumbent on the case manager of the IEP. These meeting and coordinated planning are mandated two times per year. The meetings, in addition to a more detailed written section for this IEP make this category time consuming.

Increased funding for the intensive behaviour category counterbalanced with the stringency of the criteria can create a dilemma when deciding which category to place students. School district behaviour teams rely on identification of students in the intensive behaviour category to justify their positions. This means they are often canvassing schools for additional clients. School district funding is also increased with identification of these students. On the other hand the extensive time associated with identifying intensive behaviour students can be met with resistance at the school level due to the time factor associated with developing this IEP. Often the time and effort associated with developing an intensive behaviour IEP does not seem warranted by the special education teacher. The services provided to an intensive behaviour student are often the same as those provided to someone in the moderate behaviour category. The major difference is the involvement of outside agencies. Although contributions of
outside agencies on occasion have a place in schools, it has been my experience that the majority of outside agency involvement has little relevance with the exception of extreme cases.

Planning
The second section of the IEP process is planning. Planning, “Is a collaborative process in which the student, the parents, and educators identify educational goals that are appropriate to the student, and the ways of attaining them.” (B.C. Ministry of Education 2006, p.15).

A student who has been assessed as meeting the criteria for one of the funding categories will receive an Individual Education Plan. The IEP is defined as:

An IEP is a documented plan developed for a student with special needs that describes individualized goals, adaptations, modifications, the services to be provided, and includes the measures for tracking achievement. It serves as a tool for collaborative planning among the school, the parents, the student where appropriate, school district personnel other ministries and community agencies. (B.C Ministry of Education 2006, p.16)

This directive provides the framework for IEP planning. How this document is planned varies within schools.

The IEP document contains information pertaining to the student’s needs which differ depending on their category of funding. Within these documents there are some
commonalities. Included in all IEPs is student information. Student information includes: name, date of birth, guardians and category the student is being funded in. Also on this page there is the revision date for IEP and a place to designate a modified or adapted program is being provided. There is a testing section which shows students current levels of performance and any additional testing which pertains to the student’s disability. The personnel who will be involved with the student and location where service which be provided. Each IEP contains a list of the student’s strengths and weaknesses. There is a section showing goals and objectives for the student, how they will be attained and methods of measurement or tracking of achievement.

Goal planning for IEPs varies depending on the needs of the student. Most IEPs contain a section for academic goals and social goals. Academic goals will be broken into three areas. Typically there will be math, reading and writing goals which will be included, depending on the disability which has been assessed. Social goals can be included in IEPs for students in any funding category, but are most often found in IEPs for students funded in areas where social-emotional needs are a priority. Examples would be areas where physical or mental limitations necessitate improving social skills. Students with severe physical and mental disabilities IEPs would include academic and social goals which would be categorized as life skills. Examples of life skills would be learning how to take a bus, traffic safety and basic cooking skills.

How are goals planned? There are a number of ways that goals are developed for students. Some practises are better than others. The first question is whether you are
developing a first time IEP for a student, or has the student had an IEP in place in past years. Creating a first time document takes substantially more time to complete. If the student has received an IEP in the past, all of the student information section of the IEP has been completed. In addition, all prior testing and current academic levels at the end of prior year are in place, if the document was properly updated. In most cases, some goals are carried over from prior years to the current IEP. This practise can lead to IEPs which have less validity each subsequent year. Goals which are being worked toward, and not yet being achieved should continue to be included the IEP. The practise, however, is often to roll over the whole document, only making minor changes for personnel and teaching strategies. This can lead to outdated IEPs. They fulfill the obligation of creating a document for funding purposes, but don’t provide the student with meaningful goals.

Planning goals for students with first time IEPs is often complex. The basic student information can be developed by examining the student file. Goals are usually developed by using prior and current testing, occasionally teacher consultation and infrequently parent and student input. A student who is receiving a first time IEP would have recent testing completed as a requirement for placement in a funding category.

All academic funding categories necessitate that the student has had a psycho-educational test done. This test would show the areas of deficiency for the student. The test report would have a summary stating the learning disability, and recommendations which should be addressed in the IEP. An example of this comes from a recent psycho-educational report which states:
He demonstrated very weak achievement in Spelling and Written Expression, where he scored much lower than expected for a teenager with his general cognitive ability. Consequently, he fits the BC Ministry of Education guidelines for a student with severe learning disabilities in the area of Spelling and Written Output. (Kuppers 2007)

The following section of the Psycho-educational report describes recommendations that should be in place for the student. The recommendations suggested for this student include providing additional time for exams and assignments. He may need to have a reduced workload or a reader or scribe for lengthy passages. The student would benefit from multiple choice type questions as opposed to recall questions. Use of a hand held spell checker or spelling check on word processing should be used. The student should be provided outlines to follow, and receive editorial assistance. These adaptations would be provided for the student and listed in the IEP.

The goals set in this student’s IEP under the topic of Academic Skills long term goals would be: The student will increase his reading comprehension skills to grade level. The student will meet expectations for writing at his grade level. The student will improve his self-advocacy skills. These long term or more general goals are broken down into objectives and instructional strategies that will be used. An example for this student in the area of writing would be to learn to organize information and record this information in paragraph form. The instructional strategies attached to this objective are: teaching the use of the graphic organizer program, inspiration to record and develop information into
paragraph form, receiving direct instruction on proofreading from the Resource Program on writing skills.

When planning a first time IEP, the goals, objectives and strategies are often identical to other student IEPs, who have similar learning disabilities. An IEP which has been developed from a prior year has goals which are often rolled over to the following year. In discussions with colleagues, this appears to be a common practise throughout our school district. Differences which occur from year to year, take place in the area of objectives and instructional strategies. You often use some of the strategies that prior teachers have had success using with the student, and you also have some strategies with which you have had success.

The writing of the IEP should show collaboration has taken place between educators. Depending on their needs, the student could be spending a large proportion of their day in the regular class. It is important therefore, for class teachers to have substantial input when creating the IEP. Specific instructional strategies used in class should be included in the IEP. It has been my experience, however, that teachers don’t routinely have input into the IEP. Often teachers would prefer the document to be completed, then add any minor changes they deem necessary. IEPs are often signed off by teachers without truly understanding the document. There may be a variety of reasons for this. Teacher inexperience in working with IEPs may lead to a lack of confidence in questioning the document. Some teachers prefer not to spend time working on the IEP because they see it as the responsibility of the Student Services teacher. The process of writing the document
Developing an Effective Individual Education Plan 22

can become more time consuming and onerous for student services teachers when they have to collaborate with the class teacher. For this reason some student services teachers will not ask for input from the teacher.

In the Coquitlam School District some of the funding categories allow for two days release time to write an IEP. The case manager or student services teachers take ownership of these days to write the IEPs. This, however, may not be the full intent of these days. The Provincial and Local Consolidation Working Document (1998) states, “A teacher enrolling a student in who is funded (in certain categories) shall receive up to two days release time to review or assist in developing a student’s IEP” (p.48). The wording suggests that the release days belong to the enrolling class teacher, to provide input into developing the IEP. Further to this, the Working Document (1998) states, “Responsibility for the development and coordination of the student’s IEP rests with the school based support teacher (student services teacher) who will work collaboratively with the class teacher” (p.48). The reality is that the student services teacher is responsible for writing the IEP, and therefore the release time should be allotted to that person. It is clear, though, that the teacher should be provided time for input. The funding categories that release time is provided for are A, B, C, G and H. Categories A, B and C would be students who are low functioning academically, and therefore would spend limited time with regular teachers. Category G, autism, depending on the level of functioning and category H, severe behaviour would necessitate collaboration between teacher and student services teacher. These categories provide the most funding for the district, therefore, the release days are attached. The reality is, that the other categories which are
not so heavily funded, and don’t receive release time, are students who necessitate greater collaborative discussion between teachers.

In addition to teacher involvement in the planning process, the parents, and student depending on their level of functioning should have involvement in the planning process. How this takes place varies depending on the school and student services provider. One method, used at Kwayhquitlum Middle School during the initial stages of planning, is an IEP planning sheet that may be sent home for parents and their children to fill out. This form includes questions on student strengths and weaknesses, the ways they learn best and teaching methods that have provided them with the most success. This document allows parents and students a forum for involvement in the initial stages of planning. The information gathered can be seen as fulfilling the obligation of providing parents and students with input to the IEP. This method of family involvement is often preferable for families who do not feel comfortable in meetings. This manner of participation allows thoughtful input without the pressure of being in a formal meeting. This method is time efficient, but may not produce an effective IEP.

Some parents prefer being involved in a face to face meeting. In this case the student services teachers will attempt to set up a meeting with all the members who will be involved in the development and implementation of the IEP. The meeting should include: the case manager, class teachers, parents, student if suitable, and any of the following people who are involved, special education assistant, counsellor, administrator, occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech and language personnel and any outside
agencies. The reality is that most meetings involve the parents and the case manager. Occasionally, the class teacher participates, and less frequently the other people who were listed above would be present. This has its benefits and drawbacks.

Some parents may be intimidated by a meeting with too many people. Educators may use language which is unfamiliar to people outside of the educational realm. Parents may participate less, if they are in this setting. The more intimate setting with parents, case manager and perhaps teachers allows for a greater interchange of ideas. It has been my experience that parent’s participation increases with fewer educators at the meeting. Some parents, however, prefer to meet with all parties who are involved in the IEP. These parents typically have a greater understanding of the IEP process.

The B.C. Ministry of Education and Coquitlam School District also suggest involving students in IEP meetings whenever possible. The theory being, the more involvement the student has in developing the IEP, the greater ownership they will take. If the student is capable of understanding the proceedings, the case manager should make the offer to the parents for the student to attend the meeting. At Kwayhquitlum Middle School, student attendance at meetings is very rare. Discussions I have had with other student services teachers indicates this is typical. On the rare occasion a student is involved in an IEP meeting, Meetings should be divided into two parts. During the first part of the meeting the student would not be included. In this portion of the meeting, the participants could discuss all aspects of the student’s academic, social and emotional development. These discussions can often be uncomfortable for students, and unnecessary for them to be
involved. Where there may be benefit, is when the goals are being set, and ways of attaining them are discussed, the student needs a clear understanding. Students at Kwayhquitlum rarely participate in meetings, and often have no idea of the goals and objectives which have been set for them.

During IEP meetings, the case manager would lead the meeting. The meeting would begin with introductions and a review of the prior IEP if one existed. In addition, at Kwayhquitlum Middle School there is an IEP review which is written by the case manager at the end of the prior school year, delineating successes, and addressing areas necessitating further support. During this review, parents would provide feedback regarding what strategies had been successful with their child. Revision notes would be made for additions and deletions which need to be made to the new document. Input from other parties would also be collected by the case manager.

The information gathered from the meeting would be developed into the first draft of the new IEP. The new draft is sent home for parents to review. Parents have the option of signing the document, making revisions on the document or asking for a new meeting to clarify information. A majority of the time the IEP will be signed off at this point. If not, a follow up meeting or phone call will occur for clarification of the document, or to make any changes that are necessary. This document will then be signed by the parent, and all participants involved in IEP. A mandatory signature is necessary from the school administrator for the document is necessary to satisfy all legal obligations.
An important component of the IEP planning section is transitioning students. Transitioning students takes place when entering kindergarten from the home, from elementary school to middle school, from middle school to high school and from high school back to the community. The transition planning provides connections for students from childhood to adulthood. Transitioning plans lay out transition goals which provide linkages between the various settings.

An example of a transition plan from middle school to high school would start with contact between the case managers at each school. A meeting would be set where the IEP from the middle school is shared with the high school case manager. Course selections for the student would be developed with adaptations or modifications that would be needed for the student to be successful. An example would be for a student with a learning disability in math. There are three possible selections at the high school level. A modified math program may be necessary, or if the student is more capable they may be able to handle a math introduction course for that grade with a learning center support block, or regular math with a learning center block. If the student has a physical disability, certain courses may necessitate special education assistants or SEAs to be assigned to the student. An example of this could be home economics or technology education. Safety concerns relating to these courses may allow participation of students with disabilities only if support staff is available to this setting.

Here is an example of an involved transition plan for a student with academic and medical needs. The student has a life threatening medical condition, and suffers some mental impairment due to oxygen deprivation at birth. The student’s medical condition
didn’t allow him to speak. Communication was attained through signing or using technology which would read out his type written words. This student had a full time nurse who shadowed him in case his breathing passage became blocked, and he needed immediate medical attention. This transition was particularly involved because it surrounded both academic and life threatening medical issues. The process began with an exchange of emails between case managers at the transitioning schools. A meeting time is set where academic issues are discussed. This student was working on a modified program, which is defined as not working towards the learning outcomes of students for a particular age. This means the academic component of his program would be delivered through skill development. The program would be designed to fit the student’s ability level, which in this case would be an academic level of grade three to four. To prepare the student for the academic portion of his transition several trips to the high school should be made to become familiar with the new setting. Each trip time would be spent with the high school case manager to develop the necessary connection between parties.

The second part of the transition involved medical issues. A meeting including the student’s parents, ministry of health representative, nurse, both case managers and school administration is scheduled. This meeting examined the care plan, the emergency contingency plans, the roles and responsibilities of the nurse in the school system. The parents voiced their concerns about the new setting, and what his academic program would be. A follow up meeting was organized for the student and the nurse to meet the SEA staff that would be involved.
This transition plan could take upward of twenty hours to complete. Although time consuming, it is a very important component of the IEP planning. Providing a student with challenges the best start possible in a new setting involves substantial time and preparation.

There are some differences to IEP documents depending on the funding category. The behaviour categories must include a functional behaviour assessment. This assessment gives a detailed description of the problem behaviours, settings where the behaviour occurs, triggers for behaviour, warning signs, and how the behaviour will be tracked. A common example of tracking would be teacher observation tally sheets, or number of times student is written up for certain behaviour. This IEP must also include a history of attempted interventions and an action plan. The action plan clearly defines the roles of ministry or outside agency involved with the student, the school and the parents.

As discussed before, there are two behaviour funding categories. There is Category R, which is for moderate behaviour issues and Category H, for intensive behaviour or mental illness. The main difference is Category H students must have involvement from an outside agency. The document for both IEPs requires substantial time. The documents themselves are both detailed, with the extra component of outside agency involvement for Category H.

There are a variety of outside agencies which satisfy the criteria for category H. Some examples of agencies are: government agencies (i.e. social services), outside counselling
agencies, and mental health authorities being the most common. It has been my experience that outside agencies have minimal involvement with students funded in category H. The suggestion of involvement from the outside agency provides the illusion that there is a greater level of support for this student. I suggest this is not the case. It creates additional time to contact and interact with outside agencies, so the IEP document is satisfied. The reality is that there will be a brief interaction with the contact person, and infrequently is relevant information is exchanged. The majority of time the contact is made by phone or email. Both the outside agency and the person writing the IEP know this is a formality. Time constraints for all parties are the biggest obstacle in this process. There is infrequently a benefit from this interaction. This additional criterion creates another hoop that you must jump through to satisfy this category. This time could be better spent providing service for the student.

Some categories provide support staff which are beneficial to the planning process. Included in this group, would be autism support staff, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists and vision specialists. The common thread with all of these individuals is they are under contract from the district to provide service. They are relatively easy to contact, and have a willingness to meet, provide planning input, and support for implementation of programs. Agencies which don’t have an affiliation to the school district are not as willing to provide support. Funding categories where outside agencies are currently needed to meet the criteria, should be re-examined.
Program Support and Implementation

Program support and implementation is, “Putting into practise the plans, strategies and support agreed upon in the IEP,” (B.C Ministry of Education 2006, p. 19). It is necessary, therefore, for all involved parties to have an understanding of their role for implementation of the IEP. Depending on the complexity of the IEP, the number of people involved would vary. A straight forward IEP would include: case manager, teachers and administration. A complex IEP for a student with physical and mental disabilities may include: case manager, teachers, special education assistants, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language specialists and other support agencies outside the school system.

It would be the case manager’s responsibility to make sure that all involved parties understand their role in supporting or implementing the IEP. As discussed in the prior section, IEP meetings may not include all responsible parties. If this is the case, it would be incumbent on the case manager to meet with the responsible parties, and discuss their roles in the process. During these meetings, the participants would sign the IEP document. This part of the process can be time consuming. It has been my experience that outside agencies may never see or sign the IEP document. There roles are often mandatory to meet the criteria for a particular funding category.

An important part of the IEP is making sure the participants who deal directly with the student have a clear understanding of their role. The direct participants in most cases are the student services teacher, class teachers and special education assistants. The class
teacher needs to know any adaptations or modifications which have been made to the program. Routine adaptations for exams may include: the student being provided with additional time, no penalty for spelling, reduced number of questions and no essay type questions. It is also necessary that teachers have proper resources and are provided with proper in-service to provide students with, “evidence informed teaching strategies,” (B.C Ministry of Education 2006, p.19). This support is rarely provided.

Reduction in special education assistants due to funding cutbacks has led to fewer students being supported. The students they support are typically functioning at lower academic levels which would minimize their involvement with the regular class. The programs that SEAs implement are mostly for students who have modified programming. The program would be constructed by the case manager or student services teacher for the SEA to implement. Depending on the competence of the SEA, the amount of time the program takes to structure can vary greatly. Competent SEAs, may have more experience working with students functioning at lower levels than student services teachers. Developing programs in conjunction with special education often provides greater success. If you structure the program together, the SEA will take more ownership when implementing. There are cases where SEAs develop and run their own programs. This practice happens due to time constraints and can’t be considered effective practice.
Evaluation and Reporting

Taking into consideration the underlying premise that the evaluation of students with IEPs should use the standards of all students wherever possible, there are three typical types of evaluations:

It is important that evaluation and reporting procedures accommodate the range of adaptations and modifications, so as to recognize students with special needs may: 1) take part in the regular program with some adaptations (i.e. the student is following the same curriculum but aspects of the program require adaptation); 2) take part in the regular program but have some modified components (i.e., in some areas; 3) the expected learning outcomes are substantially different from the regular curriculum; participate in a program that is completely modified. (B.C. Ministry of Education 2006, p.20)

The first type of evaluation would assess the student in a similar way to other students. An example of this could be the student receiving additional time to write exams or the student is orally examined as opposed to a written test. An example of the second type of evaluation would be a student who participates in the regular program in most subject areas and has a severe learning disability in math which necessitates them working on a modified math program. The last type of evaluation would be for a student whose program is modified. This student would work in a skill development program.

For each of these types of evaluations reporting would differ. The first type of evaluation would lead to the same reporting as other students. The only difference being the adaptation or adaptations that are in place must be reported. The second type of
evaluation would lead to a report similar to others with the exception of math. In the Coquitlam School District reporting system, the student would receive anecdotal reporting on their math progress with no grades in that subject area. The final type of evaluation would be reported anecdotally with no grades in any subject area.

The evaluation of students in each of these scenarios is sometimes flawed. The first type of evaluation assesses students using the same criteria as other students, only taking into consideration their adaptations. Evaluations of students with adaptations can give teachers license to provide marks which have not been achieved by the student. The dilemma is that a student who has an IEP in place with adaptations is difficult to fail. If you provide a failing mark for the student, are the adaptations in place substantive enough to offset the disability? A student with a disability may not be working to their potential; however, there is always the question of whether ability or work ethic has impeded their success or failure.

Students who have been modified in all areas are evaluated against the goals that have been set for them. This type of evaluation is not empirical and therefore provides leeway for the case manager to report on the student. If the goals which have been provided in the IEP are attainable then evaluation is straight forward. The difficulty lies in evaluating a student with who has severe disabilities. Often, this student has goals in the IEP which have been difficult to create. An example of this can be seen when the student makes eye contact ninety percent of the time when spoken to. Honest evaluation can be difficult in some cases.
In each of these three scenarios there is room to manipulate results. The question is, are the adapted or modified students being properly assessed? Without proper advocates, the more severe the disability, the possibility more error could occur in evaluation and reporting. Stringent guidelines placed on IEPs for severely disabled students may lead to poor evaluating and reporting practises. Because there is more money allotted for these students, the government creates a situation which may force the creation of unrealistic goals. These goals may or may not be evaluated and reported on correctly. Parental understanding of the IEP can alleviate these concerns.

**Summary of Policy**

It is clear that the IEP process can be developed in a variety of ways within the structure laid out by the government. The allowance for individual interpretation and lack of funding in special education may create flaws in the process. The identification and assessment of students allows for some students to fall through the cracks due to teacher inexperience. Students who are identified as candidates for testing are often on long waiting lists. Due to time constraints inclusion of parents, students, class teachers and outside agencies are often overlooked when planning the IEP. A lack of care in goal and objective setting leaves students with ineffective IEPs. Reporting and evaluation practises need to be shored up to ensure that proper measurement of the student’s goals is taking place.
Chapter 3

Literature Review

The following literature review will examine five areas of the IEP which could be addressed to provide a more effective IEP process:

1. Class teacher involvement in IEPs
2. Student involvement in IEPs
3. Parent involvement in IEPs
4. Time efficiency with IEPs
5. Meaning goals for IEPs

Following each section of the literature review I will pose a question which is supported by the literature as an important component of an IEP. Each question is designed to assist authors to develop more effective IEPs. Reviewing these components of the individual education plans may lead to revision of documents, or greater thought in writing future IEPs.

Class Teacher Involvement in IEPs

An integral component of the IEP planning team is the regular class teacher. My discussion of regular class teacher involvement and understanding of the IEP process show there is a wide spectrum of involvement and interest at Kwayhquitlum Middle School. Class teachers, however, need to take an active role in the IEP process because of increasing inclusionary practises. Class teachers, therefore, are often on the front lines for implementing IEPs. A study respondent succinctly stated that, “In order to have effective
IEP linkages with the general curriculum, the general education teacher must be a key player in the IEP development and implementation” (Forum at NASDSE 1998, p.4). Also, Schrag (1996) concurs that regular classroom teachers are as important to the process because of their daily involvement with the student.

It is vital, therefore, that teachers are involved, and understand the IEP document. This, however, is often not the case. Karger (2004) discusses the limited role played by general educators in the developing the IEP. Karger supports this argument citing a study by Nevin, Semmel & McCann who surveyed fifty-nine general education teachers who felt not included in the IEP process. They also related that several modifications or adaptations they were using in the class were not included in the IEP document. Karger (2004) also cites a study by Pugach who sent questionnaires to thirty-three general education teachers with the majority of responses stating they were not involved in the IEP development for students in their class. Supporting this notion is a study by Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Allen (1982) of IEP team meetings that concluded, “General and special education teachers did not interact or did so in a superficial manner,” (as cited in Schrag 1996, p.10). Collaboration between general and special education teachers would paramount to developing an effective IEP process.

Menlove, Hudson & Suter (2001) offered strategies to improve attendance and participation of general educators in IEP meetings that included: effectively collaborating and communicating regularly with general educators; hiring substitutes to provide release time; sharing blank IEP forms prior to IEP meetings; using an agenda to preview what
will happen during the meeting; providing training specific to the IEP process; and providing training on the connection between IEPs and instruction. Martin, Marshall & Sale (2004) agree stating, “Just as students need instruction in the IEP process and the meeting, so do general education teachers. Most importantly, general educators need to leave the IEP meeting feeling good about their contributions ....” (p.295). This positive attitude can translate to heightened involvement and interest in the program. It is important that teachers receive, “In-service programs need to teach general educators IEP terminology, explain the IEP process and the different roles the participants play, and show how they can become involved in the decision-making process,” (Martin, Marshall & Sale 2004, p.295).

At Kwayhquitlum Middle School, level teachers are divided into teams with a special education teacher associated with each team. Communication between class teacher and student services teacher is, for the most part, not a problem, due to common preparation times provided for team meetings. The student services teacher is responsible for holding one meeting a week to discuss ministry funded students. This type of organization allows for a good line of communication between class and student services teacher. These lines of communication could be an issue, especially at elementary school or high school where student services personnel and teachers are separate. Coquitlam School District does provide designated release time for specific funding categories. This time could be used to involve regular class teachers. Providing class teachers the opportunity to be involved in IEP development without giving up their preparation time would increase participation. Most professional development surrounding IEPs is geared towards
student services teachers as opposed to regular class teachers. It is difficult to say whether regular class teachers would be willing to attend professional development sessions which take place outside of the school day. To have a more knowledgeable, involved class teacher, it may be necessary to provide during school release time for greater participation. Pretti-Fontczak & Bricker state, “Research has shown that training teachers on writing IEP goals and using curriculum-based assessment and evaluation measures makes a significant difference in the quality of goals and objectives written for a student,” (as cited in Sopko, 2003, p.13). Inclusive practises necessitate greater involvement from class teachers.

Question 1: Have you involved the teacher in the IEP process?

**Student Involvement in IEPs**

Students are often not included in IEP meetins. They are not included in meetings for a variety of reasons. Their disability may not allow them to understand the proceedings. Parents may not wish their children to be part of the meeting because it would mean that parents would need to participate to a greater extent. The case manager may be under time constraints, and doesn’t want to take the time to prepare the student to participate effectively in the meeting. Is it fair, however, to exclude the main stakeholder in the process for these reasons?

Students should be involved in IEP meetings when there will be a benefit derived from their inclusion. For students to participate in an effective manner, it would necessitate preparation. Preparation takes time, which is at a premium, so it would be important to
carefully choose students who benefit. Students from behaviour and learning disability categories could benefit from participation. Behaviour students are routinely included in discussions about their negative behaviours. Behaviour contracts are put in place to address these negative behaviours. Including a student funded for behaviour in the formal IEP process would give the student a clear understanding of the behaviours that need to be changed, and ways that these goals can be achieved. Behaviour contracts are often if you behave this way, this will be the result. IEPs are looking for solutions to problems. Professional judgement would need to be used to choose student participants. Some guidelines when considering students are: “Ability to understand the process (cognitive functioning), ability to conduct him or herself appropriately in the meeting, emotional maturity and accommodation needs,” (Mueller, Engiles & Peter 2003, p.7). They go on to say other students who do not fit these criteria may become involved in a more limited fashion. An example is having the student participate in a mock IEP. If successful, they may be considered for the real IEP meeting. It needs to be clear, however, that the student derives some benefit from involvement. Once again, professional judgement must play a role.

Why should students participate in IEP meetings? The student is the focal point of the process. They should understand to the best of their ability the program which being set out for them. They should assist in the decision making wherever possible to create some ownership of the IEP. Arndt, Konrad, & Test (2006) state, “When students participate in choosing their IEP and transition goals based on their preferences and interests, they feel
invested in the process” (p.194). This investment may lead to taking a greater interest in attaining goals.

How can we involve students in IEP meetings? For students to participate effectively they need to be taught skills. Martin et al., (2006) believe that, “Teachers need to instruct their students on how to participate in their IEP meeting as a way to learn crucial self-determination skills, including self-advocacy, goal setting, self-evaluation, and adjustment,” (p.299). Wehmeyer, Agran & Hughes (1998) agreed and further defined the skills involved in self-determination to include: “Choice making; decision making; problem solving; goal setting and attainment; self observation, evaluation and reinforcement; self understanding, self instruction, self advocacy and leadership; positive self efficacy and outcome expectancy.” These important life skills could be taught to students as part of the goal setting for their IEP. A number of studies have shown positive effects from this type of instruction. The most thorough review of literature was completed by Algozzine, Browder, Karvonen, Test, & Wood (2001), who evaluated fifty-one studies involving self-determination. Although the literature suggested a need for further empirical evaluation, the general consensus was that self-determination has a positive outcome for students with learning disabilities. These learned skills created greater involvement in the IEP meeting.

Question 2: Have you involved the student in the IEP process where possible?

**Parent Involvement in IEPs**

Without parent involvement, it follows that students likely wouldn’t participate. Parents, therefore, become a vital link in the IEP process. It is also mandated that a parent should
be consulted when developing the IEP. The words, “should be consulted”, provide case managers the option to include parents to a level they can decide upon. As the case manager, if a parent doesn’t show interest in being involved, it becomes more time efficient to leave them out of the process. It is often viewed that this is one step that can removed from the process to save time. Instead of having to hold two meetings, one to discuss the student and goals to be included, and a follow up meeting to review the IEP before signing, the document could be written, and sent home directly for signing. This would eliminate substantial time from the procedure, and give the case manager the leeway to write goals which may not be as clear or defined as when the parent are involved. Rock (2000) agrees suggesting, “One of the major effects of lack of parental participation and decision making has been in the development of educationally unsound IEPS” (p.32). It is easy to justify parents’ lack of involvement or satisfaction with the decisions being made about their child. This may be false justification.

Smith (2001) suggests reasons parents don’t participate in the IEP process.

“Communication problems and educational jargon,” (para.5). A group of educators using language which is common place in education, but unfamiliar to those outside the profession can limit the parents level of comfort and understanding. “Lack of understanding of the school system, lack of knowledge of how to help their child, or feelings of inferiority,” (para.6). Parents from different cultures may feel it impolite to question teachers about practices. “Logistical problems,” (para.7), are a concern for parents without vehicles, work commitments or possibly other children to look after.
There are also some parents who have lost interest in attending school meetings. How can we overcome some of these barriers, and restore interest in the process?

To create open lines of communication parents should be phoned at the beginning of each year by the new case manager to introduce themselves. Schools routinely have ‘meet the teacher night’ during the first few weeks of school. An invitation to drop by and have a conversation is a good ice breaker. When the case manager meets it is incumbent on them to alleviate parental concerns about their child for the upcoming year, and invite them to participate in developing the IEP. Rock (2003) feels that we must develop a positive relationship prior to the IEP conference, if we are going have effective communication in the IEP development. Effective communication must carry over to the IEP meeting. To create an atmosphere of collaboration Sopko (2003), suggests the person facilitating the meeting: Greets the parents; introduces all IEP meeting participants and explains their roles; states the purpose of the meeting; shares the strengths and positive observations about the child; provides enough time for a complete discussion during the meeting; and be flexible” (p.5). If you can get the parent to buy in to the IEP process, their involvement will be beneficial to the success.

In Sopko (2003) the literature describes the benefits of parent involvement, and offers strategies to facilitate meaningful participation of parents in IEP meetings. The literature suggests through involvement, parents “Increase their knowledge about the child’s educational setting, teachers acquire knowledge and information about the child’s home environment, parents and teachers improve communication and the student is more likely
to achieve the goals developed collaboratively by the parents and teachers,” (p.5).

Parental involvement can also improve the quality of IEP developed by the student services teacher. By facilitating meaningful parental participation and decision making, teachers can improve their IEP process and product practices” (Rock 2003, p.32). These factors lead to the involvement of parents as an effective practice in the IEP process.

Question 3: Have you included the parents or guardian in the IEP process?

**Time efficient IEPs**

Creating an effective IEP process in some ways seems contradictory. To have an effective IEP process, we need to be doing a better job of including class teachers, parents and students. To involve these people takes additional time. To provide this additional service to an already overburdened system without cutting down on other areas of the process would be possible, but not efficient. It is necessary, therefore, to find areas of the IEP development which do not reduce IEP effectiveness, but reduce the time it takes to prepare the document, therefore improving efficiency.

Literature regarding the short comings of IEPs often highlights the time factor involved in development and implementation of these documents. Rodger (1995) refers to the tedious and time consuming nature of IEPs. Milward et. al., (2002) state that a “Recurring theme throughout the literature is the time-consuming nature of the IEP process” (p.13). How can IEPs be developed efficiently?
An area which has improved efficiency is the use of computer generated IEPs. In the Coquitlam School District we have developed templates for each funding category which are available on the school district website. Each template contains the criteria which must be met for the student to be included in a particular funding category. Prior to having templates for each category, there were a variety of IEP forms being used throughout the school district. Some forms met the criteria of funding categories, and some didn’t. The use of the same forms generated by the school district provides consistency for case managers. These forms allows the IEPs to be emailed to the new school or case manager with all the basic information completed. In addition, the new case manager can make the adjustments to the same form each year. IEP changes may only be minimal. This is also efficient, because the parents, students, class teachers would develop a better understanding of a consistent document. An issue which arises is regular changes occur for the criteria of funding categories. These changes necessitate generating new templates by the school district. It follows that efficiency would initially decrease as the case manager would need to become familiar with the new document. Overall, computer generated templates have improved efficiency. Davis (1985) discusses the use of computerized programs for IEPs. He finds that computer use for developing IEPs decreases preparation time and increases teacher efficiency. Krivacska (1987) agrees with using computer based IEP programs reduces the amount of time it takes to write IEPs, particularly when similar goals are being reproduced for different students.

The literature suggests other innovations which would necessitate a change in philosophy surrounding the development of IEPs. Frankl (2005) suggests reducing the number of
Developing an Effective Individual Education Plan

IEPs that student service teachers are responsible for by proving group educational plans within a class setting. The responsibility for these students would shift to the classroom teacher. This would allow the student services teacher to provide a consultancy position within the school. Ofsted believes that, “IEPs are redundant unless they are incorporated into class planning,” (as cited in Frankl, 2005, p.77). This system, referred to as clustering, is currently being used in Coquitlam School District to provide service for gifted students. Class teachers receive support from student services teachers in developing and writing programs for the gifted group in their class. Group IEPs have provided a reduction in the paperwork for this funded area. Tenant (2007) cites numerous authors with provisions for “Good practice in writing and implementing IEPs” (p.204). He supports Frankl’s view of developing group education plans in the class. Tenant (2007), mentions Dfee’s suggestion for reducing the number of targets for students, therefore, reducing paperwork for the case manager. With experience case managers will develop methods to reduce time considerations without reducing effectiveness of the document.

Survey Question 4: Are you using efficient methods for creating IEPs?

**Meaningful goals for IEPs**

Efficiency can be attained by setting meaningful goals for students with IEPs. The creation of meaningful goals for a student, who is receiving an IEP in their elementary years, would mean fewer adjustments would need to be made to goals in following years. If a student has an IEP which loosely addresses their needs at an early stage in their academic life, substantial revision would be necessary in future IEPs. If the responsibility
for developing appropriate goals is implemented early in the student’s individual education plan, future IEPs become less time consuming. Appropriate, meaningful benchmarks and goals at an early age provide a path with can be easily continued throughout a student’s academic life.

An effective IEP process must contain meaningful goals and objectives for students. Derrington, Evans & Lee view the process of writing the IEP as least as important as the finished product, (as cited in Tenant 2007). Kamens (2004) mirrors these thoughts saying “If the IEP is to be useful, teachers must see it as a meaningful document and attach meaning to the writing of IEPs” (p.77). Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Bateman & Linden (1998), concur stating, “The typical IEP is empty, many, if not most goals could not be measured if one tried, and all too often no effort is made to actually assess the child’s progress towards the goal” (p.63). The purpose of annual goals and benchmarks or short term objectives is to evaluate the progress a student makes in the special education program. The suggestion being that student services teachers should be providing students with IEPs which are relevant and address the needs indicated from testing.

Mager states, “The purpose of goals was to provide educators a sound basis for selected instructional content to be taught and a means for finding out if the outcomes of the instruction had been accomplished” (as cited in Yell & Stecker, 2003, p.77). The setting of sound goals and short term objectives, therefore, allows parents, students and educators the opportunity to frequently assess whether the goals are being addressed
through the education the student is receiving. Yell & Strecker (2003) believe by writing short term objectives it becomes easy to assess whether a student is developing the skills to meet the long term goal. If the instruction is not moving towards the outcomes which have been set, the goals need to be revisited. Parental involvement at the goal setting stage makes educators more diligent about setting meaningful goals, (Rock 2003).

Students who were receiving instruction on writing effective IEPs reflected on the importance of collaboration with the class teachers, and the importance of providing a carefully constructed IEP because it is a determining factor in the type of education the student will receive, (Kamens 2004). The more clearly and credibly that goals are written for students, the more likely successes may follow.

Survey Question 5: Have you written meaningful goals and objectives for the student?
Chapter 4

Conclusion

Developing an effective IEP process is a difficult task. To attempt to create a truly effective IEP process would necessitate changes at government, school district, school administration, and teaching levels.

The government would need to revisit their funding structure, and criteria they have mandated for each funding category. The current levels of government funding for special education does not provide enough personnel to properly service special needs students as mandated. To increase effectiveness additional funding must be dedicated to special education. Alternatively, if we maintain the current levels of personnel, the solution would need to include a reduction in the amount of paper work for some funding categories.

As the paper discusses, it is important to provide meaningful documentation in the IEP process. One solution suggested in the paper is developing group IEPs for classes. This would lead to some class teachers having a cluster of students with learning disabilities. This solution would surely be met with resistance from overburdened class teachers.
Recent attempts at inclusion of gifted clusters in regular classes have been met with resistance.

At the school district level there needs be more direction provided. Each of four zones in the Coquitlam School District has a special education coordinator who oversees the schools in their zone. Zone coordinators need to provide more direction for student services teachers and regular classroom teachers. Although, certainly under the same personnel constraints that the school level is, more in-service for inexperienced teachers is needed. This in-service would need to be provided through release time given by the district.

As inclusion becomes more of a reality, regular class teachers have to deal with a wider range of needs. “It is essential that teachers are provided training and support that would facilitate the acquisition of skills in order to provide services for children with different categories or types of disabilities.” (Lee-Tarver 2006, p.271). Lee-Tarver (2006) also suggests teaching programs should include coursework on students with disabilities. A greater understanding of students with disabilities would provide regular class teachers a greater comfort level with students who are on IEPs. This step might start to open the doors of classes willingly.

In addition to district support, this problem needs to viewed and supported more at the school administration level. Administrators’ main concern is that IEPs have followed the proper protocol. Funding could not be removed from the school if an audit showed
deficiencies in IEPs. Administrators need to provide more release time to support staffs understanding of the IEP process.

All areas of the IEP are important. A student services teacher, however, can effect the most change in the area of planning. For this reason, the questions have focussed on planning for student services teachers developing effective IEPs.

Who are the important players in an IEP? It seems obvious that the student for whom the IEP is being written for should be involved whenever possible. As the severity of the disability increases great adjustments need to be made for their involvement. As pointed out in the paper, skills need to be developed for students to participate in the IEP process. These self-determination skills are not only important for the meeting, but will be used by the student throughout life.

The parent or guardian need to know the program, so the proper support can be provided from the home. Student services teachers need to go out of their way to involve parents. It is easier to exclude the parent, but less effective when developing an IEP. Parent involvement can be a catalyst which drives production of a more effective IEP.

Class teachers’ involvement is a must. They need to receive some in-service or specialized training to develop the necessary comfort level to be involved in the IEP process. Their involvement in developing and understanding goals and objectives is
tantamount to an effective process. This will allow students in inclusive settings to receive a properly designed and implemented program.

The writing of IEPs needs improvement. It is important not to role over goals and objectives from prior year just to save time. It is clear from the literature that IEPs are often viewed as bureaucratic necessities rather than important educational documents. The writing of meaningful goals lays the foundation for an effective IEP. To write these goals effectively, input from class teachers, parents and students is vital.

The IEP process is time consuming. To have an effective process we need to be as efficient as possible in developing the IEP. Unfortunately, there doesn’t seem to be a lot of shortcuts to creating an effective process. To be efficient, we need to use a consistent computer generated documents throughout school districts. The consistency throughout a student’s academic life will save countless hours of needless paperwork. We need to work collaboratively with other student services teachers. Experience is an important component when developing an time efficient IEP. Sharing the testing load for students within a school makes the process more efficient. Administration needs to be supportive, and provide release time if possible. Group IEPs was suggested in the literature to reduce paperwork and attach the student more directly to the regular curriculum. This concept would necessitate a shift in philosophy away from individual education plans. Plans would no longer be tailored to the individual’s needs. As opposed to group IEPs, goals need to be limited for the individual to include the most important. Writing numerous goals and objectives is always time consuming and generally less effective. We must,
however, be careful not to change the process under the guise of time efficiency, or we could jeopardize important elements of the Individual Education Plan.

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