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CARE's WorkLife Solutions Monthly Wire

Child struggling in school?

Learn about the Individualized Education Program Team (IEP)

August 2011

This month's Wire is taken from one of the many articles found on our website. The article, "Individualized Education Program Team Members," relates to our August Webinar topic, "Parents Taking Action," which is attached. To access this article, log-on to www.caresworklivesolutions.com, click on the World Icon and enter your unique company password. (If you do not have a company password, contact CARE's WorkLife Solutions to request a temporary password.) Next, click on the Site Search tab on the right, enter "Education," and you will find this article as well as others relevant to that topic. You will also find Glossary Terms, Resources, Online Seminars, and more.

Individualized Education Program Team Members

By law, certain individuals must be involved in writing a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). These include: the parent(s), regular school teachers, special education teachers or providers, student (as appropriate), a school system representative, transition services agency representative, a person who can interpret evaluation results, and others with knowledge or special expertise about the child. An IEP team member may fill more than one of the team positions if properly qualified and designated. For example, the school system representative may also be the person who can interpret the child's evaluation results.

These people must work together as a team to write the child's IEP. A meeting to write the IEP must be held within 30 calendar days of deciding that the child is eligible for special education and related services.

Each team member brings important information to the IEP meeting. Members share their information and work together to write the child's Individualized Education Program. Each person's information adds to the team's understanding of the child and what services the child needs.

Parents are key members of the IEP team. They know their child very well and can talk about their child's strengths and needs as well as their ideas for enhancing their child's education. They can offer insight into how their child learns, what his or her interests are, and other aspects of the child that only a parent can know. They can listen to what the other team members think their child needs to work on at school and share their suggestions. They can also report on whether the skills the child is learning at school are being used at home.

Teachers are vital participants in the IEP meeting as well. At least one of the child's **regular education teachers** must be on the IEP team if the child is (or may be) participating in the regular education environment. The regular education teacher has a great deal to share with the team. For example, he or she might talk about:

- The general curriculum in the regular classroom;

- The aids, services or changes to the educational program that would help the child learn and achieve; and
- Strategies to help the child with behavior, if behavior is an issue.

The regular education teacher may also discuss with the IEP team the supports for school staff that are needed so that the child can:

- Advance toward his or her annual goals;
- Be involved and progress in the general curriculum;
- Participate in extracurricular and other activities; and
- Be educated with other children, both with and without disabilities.

Supports for school staff may include professional development or more training. Professional development and training are important for teachers, administrators, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and others who provide services for children with disabilities.

The child's **special education teacher** contributes important information and experience about how to educate children with disabilities. Because of his or her training in special education, this teacher can talk about such issues as

- How to modify the general curriculum to help the child learn;
- The supplementary aids and services that the child may need to be successful in the regular classroom and elsewhere;
- How to modify testing so that the student can show what he or she has learned; and
- Other aspects of individualizing instruction to meet the student's unique needs.

Beyond helping to write the IEP, the special educator has responsibility for working with the student to carry out the IEP. He or she may

- Work with the student in a resource room or special class devoted to students receiving special education services;
- Team teach with the regular education teacher; and
- Work with other school staff, particularly the regular education teacher, to provide expertise about addressing the child's unique needs.

Another important member of the IEP team is the **individual who can interpret what the child's evaluation results** mean in terms of designing appropriate instruction. The evaluation results are very useful in determining how the child is currently doing in school and what areas of need the child has. This IEP team member must be able to talk about the instructional implications of the child's evaluation results, which will help the team plan appropriate instruction to address the child's needs.

The **individual representing the school system** is also a valuable team member. This person knows a great deal about special education services and educating children with disabilities. He or she can talk about the necessary school resources. It is important that this individual have the authority to commit resources and be able to ensure that whatever services are set out in the IEP will actually be provided.

The IEP team may also include additional **individuals with knowledge or special expertise about the child**. The parent or the school system can invite these individuals to participate on the team. Parents, for example, may invite an advocate who knows the child, a professional with special expertise about the child and his or her disability, or others (such as a vocational educator who has been working with the child) who can talk about the child's strengths and/or needs. The school system may invite one or more individuals who can offer special expertise or knowledge about the child, such as a paraprofessional or related services professional. Because an important part of developing an IEP is considering a child's need for related services (see the list of related services in the box on the previous page), related service professionals are often involved as IEP team members or participants. They share their special expertise about the child's needs and how their own professional services can address those needs. Depending on the child's individual needs, some related service professionals attending the IEP meeting or otherwise helping to develop the IEP might include occupational or physical therapists, adaptive physical education providers, psychologists, or speech-language pathologists.

When an IEP is being developed for a student of transition age, **representatives from transition service agencies** can be important participants. Whenever a purpose of meeting is to consider needed transition services, the school must invite a representative of any other agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services. This individual can help the team plan any transition services the student needs. He or she can also commit the resources of the agency to pay for or provide needed

transition services. If he or she does not attend the meeting, then the school must take alternative steps to obtain the agency's participation in the planning of the student's transition services.

And, last but not least, the **student** may also be a member of the IEP team. If transition service needs or transition services are going to be discussed at the meeting, the student must be invited to attend. More and more students are participating in and even leading their own IEP meetings. This allows them to have a strong voice in their own education and can teach them a great deal about self-advocacy and self-determination.

The Regular Education Teacher as Part of the IEP Team

Appendix A of the federal regulations for Part B of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) answers many questions about the IEP. Question 24 addresses the role of the regular education teacher on the IEP team. Here's an excerpt from the answer:

"While a regular education teacher must be a member of the IEP team if the child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment, the teacher need not (depending upon the child's needs and the purpose of the specific IEP team meeting) be required to participate in all decisions made as part of the meeting or to be present throughout the entire meeting or attend every meeting. For example, the regular education teacher who is a member of the IEP team must participate in discussions and decisions about how to modify the general curriculum in the regular classroom to ensure the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum and participation in the regular education environment.

"Depending upon the specific circumstances, however, it may not be necessary for the regular education teacher to participate in discussions and decisions regarding, for example, the physical therapy needs of the child, if the teacher is not responsible for implementing that portion of the child's IEP.

"In determining the extent of the regular education teacher's participation at IEP meetings, public agencies and parents should discuss and try to reach agreement on whether the child's regular education teacher that is a member of the IEP team should be present at a particular IEP meeting and, if so, for what period of time. The extent to which it would be appropriate for the regular education teacher member of the IEP team to participate in IEP meetings must be decided on a case-by-case basis."

Related Services

A child may require any of the following related services in order to benefit from special education. Related services, as listed under IDEA, include (but are not limited to):

- Audiology services.
- Counseling services.
- Early identification and assessment of disabilities in children.
- Medical services.
- Occupational therapy.
- Orientation and mobility services.
- Parent counseling and training.
- Physical therapy.
- Psychological services.
- Recreation.
- Rehabilitation counseling services.
- School health services.
- Social work services in schools.
- Speech-language pathology services.
- Transportation.

If a child needs a particular related service in order to benefit from special education, the related service professional should be involved in developing the IEP. He or she may be invited by the school or parent to join the IEP team as a person "with knowledge or special expertise about the child."

Transition Services

Transition refers to activities meant to prepare students with disabilities for adult life. This can include developing postsecondary education and career goals, getting work experience while still in school, setting up linkages with adult service providers such as the vocational rehabilitation agency-whatever is appropriate for the student, given his or her interests, preferences, skills, and needs. Statements about the student's transition needs must be included in the IEP after the student reaches a certain age:

Transition planning, for students beginning at age 14 (and sometimes younger)—involves helping the student plan his or her courses of study (such as advanced placement or vocational education) so that the classes the student takes will lead to his or her post-school goals.

Transition services, for students beginning at age 16 (and sometimes younger)-involves providing the student with a coordinated set of services to help the student move from school to adult life. Services focus upon the student's needs or interest in such areas as: higher education or training, employment, adult services, independent living, or taking part in the community.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2000, July; Modified 2007, March 23). The IEP team members. In Lisa Küpper (ed.). *A Guide to the Individualized Education Program*. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved August 10, 2010, from <http://www.ed.gov>