Student Led IEPs – Implementing Student Led IEPs

The reality for our middle school children is high school and the real world is not far away. When students turn 18 they are the ones responsible for advocating for themselves. Currently there is very little in place to teach these skills.

What is Self-Determination?
Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer (1998) defined self-determination:

- A combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior.
- An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations, together with a belief of oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination.
- When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society.

Studies show that students who included self-determination goals in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) were more likely to earn a higher income one year after graduation. (Wehmeyer, 2004) and “consistent trend characterized by self-determined youth doing better than their peers one year out of school. Members of the high self-determination group were more likely to have expressed a preference to live outside the family home, have a savings or checking account, and be employed for pay” (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997, p. 253).

Implementation of Student Led IEPs at Rutland Middle School:

- Teachers and parents were trained on self determination and student led IEPs through the ASPIRE project.
- ALL students with disabilities in the school participated.
- Strategies for Success: (1) Administrative buy-in; (2) Core team of Administration, Counselors, and Lead Special Ed Teacher formed to provide continuous monitoring and adjustment of the program; (3) Educating parents in advance; (4) Student participation at level of individual comfort.
- Road blocks: (1) Reluctance to change; (2) Available time; (3) Willingness on the part of the student to share; (4) Willingness on the part of the adults to listen; (5) Pushing too quickly for change; (6) Being stuck in one model of implementation.

Student Training

- With families, we began to educate students on his/her disability and the impact.
- We used a daily advisement time to discuss self determination in action, and to practice those necessary skills. (Choices and Consequences, Goal Setting, Communication of needs and wants, Rights and Responsibilities)
- We started with a focus on five questions.
  - What are you good at doing?
  - What is hard for you?
  - What makes the hard things easier to do?
  - What do you want to do in the future?
What is important for me to know about you?

- We do not edit what the student has to share. We do not tell the students what they have to say or cannot say. This is his/her idea of him/herself and students deserve our attention and acknowledgement of what s/he has to say.

Participation in Student led IEPs resulted in:

- Improved communication for students with the teachers and positive interaction with school personnel.
- More self-determined youth who have the ability to advocate for their rights and needs.
- A structure for goal setting and attainment.
- Students learning new skills.
- The ability to explain to others what they need to be successful on the job, in college or training environments, and when living independently.

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<tr>
<th>What a student led IEP is</th>
<th>What a student led IEP is not</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Allowing the student the opportunity to have a voice early on in educational planning.</td>
<td>• Turning the process over to the student.</td>
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<td>• Students having a voice leads to student buy-in of the educational plan.</td>
<td>• The student dictating what will happen in the classroom.</td>
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<td>• Allowing the student time to think about their thinking as related to the educational process</td>
<td>• A loss of control and decision making power for parents and teachers related to age or ability level of student.</td>
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<td>• Providing a place for students to gain self knowledge and learn communication skills</td>
<td>• Providing more information than the student can handle.</td>
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<td>• Students are involved in goal setting, and therefore take more personal responsibility for meeting/exceeding goals.</td>
<td>• One size fits all – each student will participate at a different level all the way from designing invitations, introducing committee members, to chairing the entire meeting!</td>
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Resources

- “all cats have Asperger’s” and “all dogs have ADHD” by Hoopman
- Quick Eligibility Guide from doe website
- Council for Exceptional Children – Teaching Exceptional Children publications since 2009
- Positive relationship with student
- Think College Self-Determination Resources: www.thinkcollege.net/for-professionals/self-determination-resources
- Inclusion Press: www.inclusion.com
- A Student’s Guide to the IEP by Marcy McGahee-Kovac 2002