

Student Led IEPs in Practice

Implementation of Student led IEPs at
Rutland Middle School



A vertical strip of five images showing colorful puzzle pieces and letters. The top image shows a close-up of red and blue puzzle pieces. The second image shows a pink puzzle piece with a white letter 'G'. The third image shows a close-up of a person's hands working with puzzle pieces. The fourth image shows colorful letters 'W', 'Y', 'R', and 'A' on a dark background. The bottom image shows a close-up of green and blue puzzle pieces.

How this became a reality...

- Rutland Middle School started in the first cohort of the Graduate First Grant.
- 2007-2008- We began writing a self determination curriculum for use with 8th grade for all students; Implemented for two years. This was not enough training for our students with disabilities.
- We saw a need for more specific training in self determination for all students with disabilities. The next logical step was to start the ASPIRE self determination program with special education students.
- ASPIRE (Active Student Participation Inspires Real Engagement) is a program that supports student led IEPs.



Self Determination

- The power or ability to make a decision for one's self without influence from the outside – Webster's Dictionary
- The idea of positive freedom, that actions are up to the individual to choose, sometimes referred to as "the dignity of risk"
- Providing opportunities for students with disabilities to have greater choice
- In IEPs - The concept that the student has knowledge about him or herself that is relevant to the educational plan.



Implementing Student led IEPs at Rutland Middle School

- This was a very new concept for our parents and families. We started with training for staff, parents/guardians, and students.
- Training for the entire administration and special education department provided on one day.
- Everyone received the same message about student led IEPs at the same time.
- This message was continuously supported and reiterated by the core team.

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- Parent Pre-survey was given
 - Parent training meeting was held in the evening
 - Defined Self Determination with parents, benefits of being self determined, and results for students that are self determined
 - Parents/Guardians began talking with students about strengths/weaknesses, medical diagnosis, previous testing, and area of eligibility
 - Each special education teacher worked closely with families of students on his or her case load to develop the student's understanding of the impact of his/her disability, strengths and weaknesses, and IEP goals.
 - Each special education teacher worked with **all** students he or she taught in each class to create opportunities for students to practice self determination.



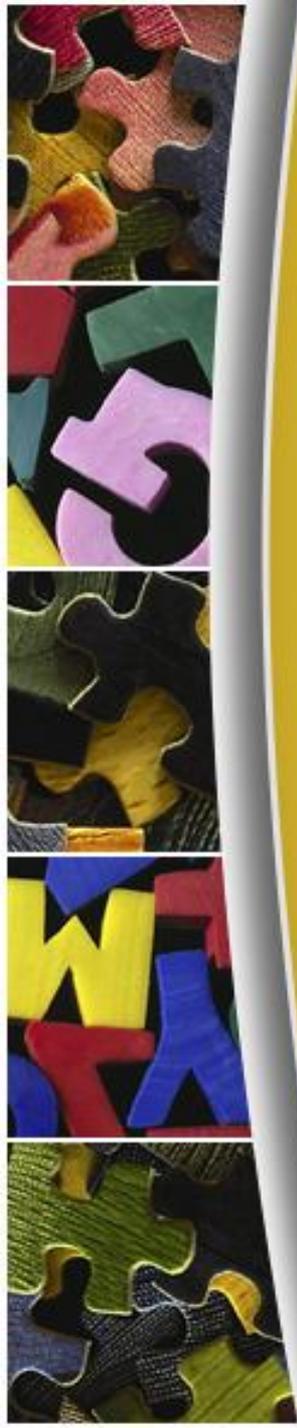
Why did we choose this...

- Practicality of Self Determination and student led IEPs: Students are required members of the transition plan portion of the IEP. Our students were not able to be productive members of this conversation.
- Age 18: Rights are transferred to students. Parents are no longer allowed access to student records without a court order or student permission. Many students were signing themselves out of any special education service and dropping out of school due to the difficulty they encountered. Our students were not graduating.



Student Training

- Students were given a pre survey.
- 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?



- Those 5 questions helped students contribute to building the information in the present levels.
- Students participated in other ways as well, such as designing and delivering invitations, choosing the committee members, creating PowerPoint presentations of the five questions, chairing the IEP meeting, and mentoring younger students.
- 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.

A vertical strip of six images showing colorful puzzle pieces and letters. The images are: 1. A close-up of various colored puzzle pieces (red, orange, yellow, green, blue). 2. A close-up of a pink puzzle piece with a white outline. 3. A close-up of a yellow puzzle piece with a white outline. 4. A close-up of a blue puzzle piece with a white outline. 5. A close-up of a red puzzle piece with a white outline. 6. A close-up of a green puzzle piece with a white outline.

Supports leading to Success

- Administrative support and buy-in
- Continuous monitoring of implementation
- Education of parents before beginning the process with each student
- Allowing all students to participate at his/her level of comfort
- Inclusive staff training
- Including all students in the ASPIRE Program
- Core Team: Administrator, Counselor, and Lead Special Education Teacher



Road Blocks to Overcome

- Reluctance to change and grow
- Time! The availability of time in the schedule for implementation, and in what we are asked to do already as special ed teachers.
- Willingness to hear student perspectives and potential solutions
- Moving too quickly
- Getting stuck in one model of student involvement
- Parental concerns and fear of being honest with students about the disability
- Student fear of sharing



My Favorite Statistic

- Studies showed a “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).
- My Translation: Self Determined youth are more likely to live on their own, have money, be employed and pay taxes.



What we saw as a result

- Improved communications with teacher 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.
- After the first year, our special ed students made AYP as a sub group through Safe Harbor (due to improvement in Math and Reading scores and attendance).
- The passing percentage in reading increased from 61% to 66%.
- The passing percentage in math increased from 34.5% to 41.2%.
- Absences dropped from 23.9% of students being absent 15+ days to 17.1%.

A vertical strip of five images on the left side of the slide. From top to bottom: 1. A close-up of colorful puzzle pieces in shades of red, orange, and yellow. 2. A close-up of colorful puzzle pieces in shades of green, blue, and pink. 3. A close-up of a child's face, looking down, with a puzzle piece shape cut out of the image. 4. A close-up of colorful puzzle pieces in shades of yellow, blue, and red. 5. A close-up of colorful puzzle pieces in shades of green, blue, and yellow.

What we noticed with students

- They take charge of their learning, with the responsibility shifting from teacher/parent to student. Students were then more willing to attempt class work, and complete assignments. We saw an increase in the level of rigor that students were able to be successful.
- When students participate in IEP goal setting, they have a vested interest in achieving those goals. We had increased student participation in the development of transition plans, making these much easier to write and implement.
- Inappropriate behaviors may decrease as students feel empowered to chart their own course. We saw a significant decrease in number of ISS days from 322 to 263.
- And hopefully, GRADUATION!



What we noticed in parents

- The fear of losing control gone.
- Parents were more interested in hearing what students had to say in meetings.
- Ultimately, after working with school staff, many parents saw the importance of the student being involved.
- Parents could see a sense of student accomplishment and pride.
- Improved communication with school personnel.

A vertical strip of five images showing colorful puzzle pieces and letters. The top image shows a mix of red, orange, and blue pieces. The second image shows a pink piece with a white shape. The third image shows a yellow piece with a white shape. The fourth image shows a blue piece with a white shape. The bottom image shows a green piece with a white shape.

Changes we noticed in ourselves

- A change in the perception of what a student led IEP is and is not.
- A stronger relationship between student and teachers.
- A better understanding of the student's mind set and history.
- IEPs were written that are more detailed and provided a clearer picture of actual student functioning including positive strengths.
- Use of more accessible vocabulary for students and parents.

A vertical strip of five images on the left side of the slide. From top to bottom: 1. A close-up of several interlocking puzzle pieces in various colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue). 2. A close-up of a few puzzle pieces, including a prominent pink one. 3. A close-up of a puzzle piece with a silhouette of a person's head and shoulders. 4. A close-up of several large, colorful letters (W, Y, R, B) made of puzzle pieces. 5. A close-up of puzzle pieces, including one with a silhouette of a person's head and shoulders.

What a student-led IEP is not

- Turning the process over to the student.
- The student dictating what will happen in the classroom.
- A loss of control and decision making power for parents and teachers related to age or ability level of student.
- Providing more information than the student can handle.
- 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!



What a student-led IEP is

- Allowing the student the opportunity to have a voice early on in educational planning.
- Students having a voice leads to student buy-in of the educational plan.
- Allowing the student time to think about their thinking as related to the educational process
- Providing a place for students to gain self knowledge and learn communication skills
- Students are involved in goal setting, and therefore take more personal responsibility for meeting/exceeding goals.



Student led IEPs for ID

- For students with intellectual disabilities we focused on
 - planning for life after high school
 - Functional/adaptive strengths and weaknesses
 - Academic strengths and weaknesses
 - Needed accommodations
 - How the student views the school day and school work and how we can improve that view.

We did not focus on psychological testing nor exact reasons for eligibility.

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Student led IEPs for LD

- These students read and discussed their psychological testing with the case manager and parents before the IEP meeting in order to understand exactly which area of processing was the concern.
- The students were very successful at learning every detail about themselves from the school perspective.
- Goal setting was impacted greatly. Several students set goals to be out of special ed service before high school. They set ambitious goals and met them! We had 4 who were able to transition to high school on consultative service and be dismissed at the end of the first semester of 9th grade.



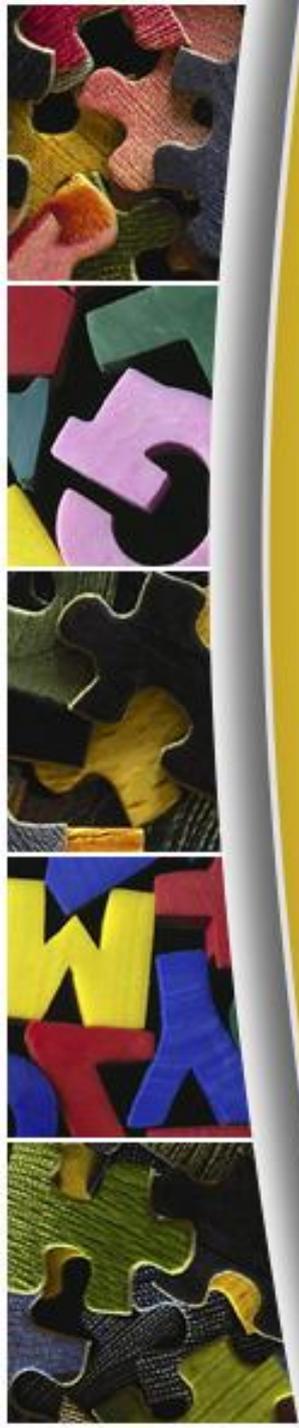
Student led IEPs for EBD

- We focused on the FBA and BIP with these students.
- They shared the same information as everyone else, but we focused on the why and when of the behavior.
- Parents shared diagnosis and information about medication with students.
- 6 students were able to transition from daily service to consultative service through the development of effective FBA and BIP.



Student led IEPs with other eligibilities

- OHI, Autism, DHH, Visually impaired, etc.
- These students highly varied in their level of participation.
- All shared their 5 questions and answers and participated in the IEP.



What it requires

- A willingness on the part of the adults to listen to student opinions
- Pre-meetings with the students for practice of what s/he will share with the committee
- Training for students and families on details of the characteristics of the disability (as appropriate for age)
- A focus more on areas of strength and areas of need, rather than a specific label or area of eligibility



Best 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
- A Resource List on Person Centered Planning
- www.inclusion.com



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