

Parent Input Case Studies

Purpose

The rule changes that will take place July 1st, 2022 include changes to the content of the Individualized Education Program (IEP), adding documentation of parent input. These rule changes affect what is currently section 2363.7, Content of IEP (34 CFR §300.320). The following document provides case studies and guiding questions for engaging parent input during the IEP process.

For the purposes of this and all related documents, the term “parent” means— (A) a natural, adoptive, or foster parent of a child (unless a foster parent is prohibited by State law from serving as a parent); (B) a guardian (but not the State if the child is a ward of the State); (C) an individual acting in the place of a natural or adoptive parent (including a grandparent, stepparent, or other relative) with whom the child lives, or an individual who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare; or (D) except as used in sections 1415(b)(2) and 1439(a)(5) of this title, an individual assigned under either of those sections to be a surrogate parent. 20 U.S.C. § 1401(23); 34 C.F.R. § 300.30.

Case Studies

Vermont’s rule changes add a specific section of the IEP that is dedicated solely to parental input. Parent collaboration in all sections of the IEP is just as important. This document will provide examples of how parental input can support the team in documenting the following segments of the IEP:

- Present levels of performance
- Annual goals and short-term objectives
- Special education services, related services, and supplementary aids and services
- Accommodations and modifications
- Educational setting, including the extent to which the child participates with non-disabled peers in classroom, non-academic, and extracurricular activities
- State and district-wide assessment decisions and modifications
- Transition planning

Present Levels of Performance: Imani

When discussing Imani’s present levels of performance regarding math calculation, her teachers remarked on the progress she’d made over the last year. She was now able to independently add and subtract double-digit numbers and decimals with 90% accuracy. Imani’s mother pointed out, however, that while she might be able to perform those calculations with pencil and paper in the classroom, she often felt ashamed because she couldn’t mentally add the number on dice while playing games with friends and family. Furthermore, Imani’s mother noted that her daughter became frustrated when trying to estimate the cost of more than one

item she wished to purchase at stores and restaurants. Imani's functional performance in math at home and in the community was valuable information for her educators to consider. Had she not been encouraged to share her thoughts at this stage of IEP development, the team may not have taken home and community functioning into consideration.

Below are examples of guiding questions that may be used to elicit similar types of input for present levels of performance:

- *What do you want us to know about (student)'s performance or feelings about (goal area)?*
- *How does (student) feel about (subject area) class this year?*
- *How does what you see at home regarding (goal area) compare to what the teachers have reported?*
- *To what degree of independence is (student) able to complete their homework in (subject area)?*
- *Where has the student been successful this year?*
- *What were the conditions you think might have allowed them to feel that success?*
- *What does it look and sound like when (student) is succeeding? What helps to keep them motivated?*
- *What were (student)'s greatest challenges or frustration this year? What do you think was at the root of those struggles? Have you noticed anything that helps them move through that frustration?*
- *What do you think interferes with (student)'s learning?*
- *What does it look and sound like when (student) is struggling? What helps when they are struggling?*
- *How does (student) learn best?*

Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives: Ricky

Ricky's team had examined his behavioral progress over the last year and was celebrating the fact that he had shown safe behavior (without a single instance of physical aggression) over the last two quarters of the school year and that his ability to take self-initiated breaks and access sensory tools had also resulted in him using positive communication skills (as defined in his function-driven individualized behavior support plan) 78% of the time. The team, with Ricky's father in complete agreement, had determined it was time to fade the level of reinforcement needed to obtain that level of performance and to challenge Ricky to attain a 90% level of proficiency in the use of positive communication skills.

Before moving on to setting academic goals, however, Ricky's youth football coach (who Ricky's father had invited to the meeting) spoke up and shared that while he was a valuable member of the team, Ricky's behavior at practices and during games did not mirror what had been described by the team. The coach did not have data to share, but Ricky's father was able to share that Ricky had "yellow flags" in more games than not and that he'd been ejected from two games for unnecessary roughness. It was at that point that Ricky's behavior interventionist reported that the times Ricky was least successful with his behavior plan at school were during PE class and at recess.

Ultimately, all members of Ricky's team decided to stick with the original goals they had discussed, but to revise his individualized behavior support plan in such a way that the reinforcement schedule would not be faded during PE and recess times. They also included a goal for the first quarter of the next school year that involved his Teacher Advisor (who happened to be the assistant football coach for the freshman football team) would use the same prompts and strategies during practice that Ricky's teachers used in the classroom, and that Ricky's plan would extend to his after-school football practices and games.

Below are examples of guiding questions that may be used to elicit similar types of input for annual goals and short-term objectives:

- *Have we used any terms or jargon that you haven't understood? Please let us know when/if we do so.*
- *We want our goals to focus on what (student) WILL do, not what they WON'T do. Can we all remind each other of this expectation if we steer off?*
- *We want (student)'s goals to be very clear and measurable. Help us to state how we'll know when (student) meets this goal?*
- *What are yours and (student)'s long-term goals for them in (goal area)? What are yours and their biggest hopes and dreams regarding (goal area)? What are your biggest fears?*
- *What would you like to see (student) accomplish this year in (goal area)?*
- *How does this goal compare to (student)'s current level of performance?*
- *Will this goal help (student) to reach grade level standards?*
- *Does this goal feel ambitious but reasonable? If not, how can we revise it?*
- *What strengths and abilities does (student) have that will help them work on their challenges in this area?*
- *What strategies and supports do you think (student) will need to accomplish this goal?*
- *Under what conditions do we want (student) to address this goal?*
- *How will we measure this goal?*
- *What have we missed? Is there anything else you'd like us to work on with (student)?*

Specialized Instruction and Related Services: Wendy

Wendy, a sixth grade student with cerebral palsy, has a variety of specialized and related services in addition to full-time 1:1 paraprofessional support. Wendy's foster parents, who are also her educational surrogates, have been actively involved in her educational program since she came into their home over a year ago.

When Wendy's occupational therapist (OT) described the direct services she proposed to deliver for the coming year and the consultative supports she planned to offer to Wendy's teachers and paraprofessional, the foster parents wanted to know more. The OT explained that she had demonstrated to school staff a variety of seating techniques for writing, word processing and art work and had made available to them modified writing paper, pencil grips, slant boards, non-slip surfaces, and computer tools.

Wendy's foster parents commented that they wish they had had similar consultation because they often struggled with how best to support her when she was doing her homework assignments. Her team then decided to add to the service page of Wendy's IEP parent counseling and training. Since Wendy had functional as well as academic goals written into her IEP, the OT also provided her foster parents with recommendations about adaptive equipment for activities of daily living, personal care, and leisure activities as well.

This conversation prompted input from Wendy's physical therapist (PT), who added the same type parent counseling and training in the form of videos and diagrams demonstrating how Wendy and her paraprofessional performed their morning stretching program.

Below are examples of guiding questions that may be used to elicit similar types of input for specialized instruction and related services:

- *Are you feeling that (student) needs more or less individualized or intensive instruction in (goal area)?*
- *What related support services does (student) need to benefit from her special education services? (examples can include transportation, SLP, OT, PT services, school health services, behavioral supports and interventions, orientation and mobility, interpreting services, social work, etc.)*
- *Are there additional supports that might help (student) achieve the annual goals we've set?*
- *What else does (student) need to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum?*
- *Are there any changes in how and what (student) is taught that might help them succeed in their classes?*
- *Here's what we've decided about who is working on what with (student) and when / where / how often those things will happen ... Are there any other questions you have about these services?*

Supplementary Aids and Services/Accommodations and Modifications: Antonio

Antonio is a middle school student with a cognitive impairment. He is well-liked by students and teachers alike and enjoys working and playing with his peers. Antonio's mother was in agreement with the team when a decision was made to begin fading support from a paraprofessional. She grew more concerned, however, and was asked about her worries.

Antonio's mother said she was very happy to hear how well-liked he was by his classmates but, she explained, as he and his peers had gotten older the gap in his social and communication skills seemed to have widened. She began to tear up when she explained that it was common for him to be invited to birthday parties of his friends while in elementary school but that wasn't happening anymore and when she tried to arrange "play dates," all of his friends seemed to be involved in organized sports or other such activities. He had begun to gravitate toward much younger peers in their neighborhood. She also stated that Antonio's older sister had noticed he sometimes sat alone in the cafeteria at lunchtime.

Antonio's teachers were surprised to hear these reports because he was still very much included in group activities in the classroom and they never had any complaints from peers when he was assigned to their group projects. He was even part of a trio at the winter chorus concert. It was

hard for all (school based?) IEP team members to discover that his peer interactions didn't seem to be carrying over outside of the classroom walls.

These concerns led the team to brainstorming some additional accommodations, modifications, supplementary aides and services and program modifications. Those things dovetailed perfectly with goals the team had already written for Antonio's social and communication skills. What was written into Antonio's IEP were services such as consultation and training from the Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) for recess and cafeteria aides on facilitating social communication (ex: how to initiate, join, and keep a conversation going; how to invite someone to join an activity).

The team also discussed and documented details of fading Antonio's paraprofessional support and agreed to keep that support in place for lunch, recess, and less structured activities at school as well as for extracurricular activities such as attending school dances, clubs, or sports teams.

Below are examples of guiding questions that may be used to elicit similar types of input for supplementary aids & services and accommodations/modifications in a variety of areas:

- *What types of things is (student) most excited about in school? How can we capitalize on their interest/motivation/success in other areas of their school, home, community life?*
- *What parts of school does (student) complain most about at home? What specifically bothers/angers/frustrates them about this? How can we make that experience better for (student)?*
- *How much time is (student) spending, on average, on homework? How are they (and you) managing it? What might help make homework time less stressful for (student) and your family? Do they need extra time to complete assignments? Shortened assignments? Time during the school day to get started or get organized?*
- *What types of tools, assistive technology, adapted materials, graphic organizers does (student) need to succeed?*
- *Does (student) have any special interests or talents that we may not be aware of? How can we use those to make (goal area) more relevant for them? How can we use that interest/talent/strength to demonstrate their learning or comprehension?*
- *How can we present (subject matter) to best help (student) grasp the information? Do we need to change the manner in which that content is presented to (student)?*
- *Do we need to change the manner in which (student)'s progress is measured?*
- *What soothes (student) when they are upset/frustrated/anxious? How can we provide (student) with access to that type of support in school?*
- *How is (student) best able to receive feedback or constructive criticism at home?*
- *How do you let (student) know when they are doing a good job?*
- *Is there any type of specific training or information that you think might help (student)'s teachers to best understand them?*

State and District Assessments: Phoebe

Phoebe is a high school junior who has a specific learning disability in the area of written expression. Phoebe has also been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder that has been well-managed but has recently cropped up again as she has begun visiting college campuses. As a result, the IEP team developed a goal around stress management. Phoebe (attending her own IEP meeting) and her mother had thought she'd completed all state assessments and were surprised and concerned to hear of the Vermont Science Assessment, administered to 11th graders. Phoebe instantly became tearful; her hands began trembling and her breathing pattern changed, all symptoms of her anxiety disorder.

Phoebe asked her team if she could just be "absent" from school on the days the tests were administered, and her mother inquired about an alternate assessment. Staff members explained that there were no "opt out" provisions for this assessment, that medical exceptions were only for medical emergencies or for serious, life-threatening illnesses. The team further described that Phoebe was not eligible to take an alternate assessment.

Phoebe's team was surprised by her strong reaction about the assessment as she was responding to her specialized services and making progress on her IEP goals, while making good use of the school's targeted supports and accommodations in her general education classes. Seeing and hearing her reaction, however, prompted her special education case manager to talk about the allowable accommodations and modifications they could provide to her for the statewide assessment.

The team first reviewed and agreed upon the embedded universal tools:

- Phoebe would answer a limited number of items per testing session that could be flexibly defined, based on her need, with breaks of no more than 20 minutes, at which time she would return to her test items. These breaks would allow her to reduce her cognitive fatigue and anxiety levels and to access sensory tools for self-regulation. Phoebe understood that this might result in her needing extra time overall to complete the assessment and that felt reasonable to both her and her mother.
- A spell check tool would be used for checking the spelling of the words Phoebe generated herself. The spell check tool is bundled with other, allowable writing tools used for planning, revising, editing.
- The only non-embedded, designated supports the team determined Phoebe would need were for noise buffers (ex: noise-cancelling headphones or white noise machines) and a separate setting. The altered test location would allow Phoebe to use a calming device and to sit in close proximity to her teacher, with whom she had a very positive and trusting relationship. All members of Phoebe's team understood that these supports would yield valid test results only when they were used in a manner consistent with the assessment guidelines.
- Staff members checked in with Phoebe and her mother to make sure they felt they had made an informed decision and that their needs were considered. Phoebe left her meeting with a smile on her face.

The process used above can serve as the means for eliciting student and parental input. It is important to know that informed decision-making was attained by all members of the team (including parents and older students) by who are familiar with the student's needs and have been trained on the guidelines for using these supports.

Transition Planning:

Excerpt from [Post-Secondary Case Study Project](#): 'Jodi is a friendly, social 17-year-old girl with a strong work ethic. She qualifies for special education with mild cognitive disabilities and intends to remain in school until she is 21. Her current course of study includes applied academics and vocational preparation and leads to a high school diploma. This year, she worked in a department store primarily stocking shelves but ran the register a few times with close support from her job coach. Jodi loves working in the retail environment and has expressed a strong desire to be employed in one after graduation as well.'

The full case study along with the [case study suite](#) break down the entire transition planning process including how to elicit input from students themselves as well as parents. Parents are a key source of information to be engaged during the transition assessment process. They give highly valuable perspectives on a student's strengths, needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to life after high school. The transition assessment process is a necessary way to gather information so the special educator can build the overall transition plan which will have goals and services designed to help that student transition to employment or higher education successfully.

Below are examples of guiding resources that may be used to elicit input for post-secondary transition:

[Transition Assessment Planning Tool](#) – This tool contains a variety of guiding topics and questions that should be used to elicit input from parents and students.

[Vermont Graduation Readiness Tool](#) - This tool is designed to create a conversation and discussion among the IEP team around many key items related to graduation readiness. It contains guiding questions for the team, with a focus on reviewing a student's progress on meeting the local graduation requirements (proficiencies or credits) and receiving reasonable and appropriate access to transition services. It is recommended that IEP teams for students as young as 9th grade start using the Graduation Readiness Tool as an agenda item at the annual IEP meeting. Having these discussions early will always be in the best interests of the student.

[VT Family Network Transition Toolkit](#) – This tool is a well-rounded resource providing process and content parents need to know regarding transition.

Please note that the LEA is required to communicate only with the student who turned 18 unless they have set up a prior plan for communication and the student who is 18 approved it. If the parent would like to remain guardian, they would need to apply before the student turns 18. For more information see the Vermont Family Network's resources on [guardianship](#).

Educational Setting: Tristan

Tristan is a 4th grade student who's been placed at an independent school that provides services for students with significant behavioral challenges for the past 18 months. He has thrived there and acquired many skills that allow him to self-regulate and to be more available for learning academics as well.

After reviewing his academic progress, Tristan's team examined his behavioral data. All team members remarked upon his progress and his mother expressed her gratitude that the alternative setting had helped her son. She even shared that Tristan had been carrying over the skills he'd learned at school to the home and community settings.

When setting annual goals for Tristan, his teachers at the independent school and his LEA representative commented that he appeared ready to transfer what he'd learned in the alternative setting to the larger setting of his local public school. Tristan's mother had an immediate negative reaction and stated clearly that she did not believe her son was ready for that transition. The team listened carefully and validated her concerns; they agreed to put the issue of reintegration aside for the moment.

Rather than rushing into a conversation about educational setting, Tristan's team formulated the goals they wanted to see him attain in the coming year. The LEA representative made sure to ask Tristan's mother what she felt her son could reasonably be expected to attain.

The LEA representative then asked the IEP to focus on what services, supports, accommodations, and modifications, Tristan would need to meet those goals and to defer judgement on where Tristan would be educated and to focus instead on what he needed in order to achieve the goals they had just developed. Once the team reached agreement on these things, they moved into a discussion about the location of Tristan's education. The overarching question to team members was: could the public school provide all of the things they had just outlined?

Tristan's mother was visibly upset. She asked, with respect, if this was an issue of funding. She was assured it was not. She asked why, then, they wanted to "kick him out" of the first school that was meeting his needs. She expressed that it felt counterintuitive for her to consider changing what was already working. The independent school's special educator reflected back what Tristan's mom had shared and then commented, "I am hearing that you're afraid Tristan will lose the progress he's made here." Tristan's mother agreed went on to describe the struggles her son and their entire family had experienced in previous years, when he was frequently suspended and shunned by his peers.

After further discussion, the IEP team developed a matrix on large paper pinned to the wall. Along one axis, they listed all of the services, supports, and accommodations they had agreed upon that day. They then used the other axis to represent what the independent school could provide (and how) and what the public school could provide (and how). When it was broken down in that manner, Tristan's mother recognized that it did, in fact, appear that her son could receive the supports he needed in his former placement. She commented that the public school had the extra benefit of a much shorter commute between home and school, more options in terms of art and music, and better access to peers without disabilities.

Once Tristan’s mother could envision her son growing in new ways while still getting the support he needed, she was able to engage in a discussion of how to make that transition happen. The team outlined several transition steps and agreed to meet monthly to review progress and to consider a change in placement. Within three months, all team members agreed that he was ready to reintegrate, and the change of placement was made to his IEP at that point.

Below are examples of guiding questions that may be used to elicit similar types of input for educational setting:

- *Is (location) the Least Restrictive Environment for (student)?*
- *How will we know when (student) is ready for (location)?*
- *What does the data tell us?*
- *Let’s talk about What (student) needs before we talk about where they’ll get it*
- *What are the benefits of (student) attending (location one)? Of (location two)?*
- *What are the drawbacks of (student attending (location one vs location two)?*
- *How does (student) feel about this?*
- *What will help (student) to feel most comfortable about (location)?*