

Stephanie:

Hey everyone. My name is Stephanie. I am your founder and host here at the intentional IEP for all of our guest speaker chats and mini trainings. I'm so excited to be here with Brin today because we're gonna be talking all about something that my teacher heart is very, very big on and that self advocacy. And when that comes to IEPs, before we dive in, though, Brin, will you please share about your teaching experience and your role at the IEP table?

Brynne:

Yeah, so, um, my name is Brent I'm a fourth year special ed teacher. I, uh, do like a combo of inclusion and resource typically. Um, and this is my fourth year teaching my fourth year in third grade. So I, I have like sweet spot for like the eight to 10 year old age range, you know, just depending. And, um, that's her all my experience wise. Um, so I come to you as a special ed teacher, but also a specialty mom. Um, my daughter has an IEP, she has born very premature. And so I have to try to take my teacher hat off sometimes when it comes to her, like, you know, just the professional and play mama bear, which is what she needs. So, uh, work, these are that I would love to talk more about and her to, to, you know, teacher stakeholder in the IEP meeting.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. So, well that makes me even more excited to talk about this because you have the teacher and the parent input on this whole conversation. Oh my goodness. Well, let's get started. What is self advocacy and why is it so important?

Speaker 2:

So to me, self advocacy is being able to stand up for what you need and what you deserve in any, in any form or fashion. And I feel like, um, it can be a student with a disability or exceptionality, but it's not always, I mean, I can advocate for myself at work and say, Hey, I need extra time do the deadline. It's as simple as that, just being able to say, I need this to accomplish this goal. Um, so, you know, you think about it in terms of our children with sexualities, they may struggle with being able to advocate for what they need or even being able to articulate. I need this. And so, um, if this comes down in meeting their IEP goals and, and making them better functioning, uh, participants and eventually adults so that they can grow into independence and it's important simply because it promotes independence with and, um, the real world eventually. So

Speaker 1:

Yes, and I could not have said it better myself. Well, what do you do with your students then when it comes to IEP? So teaching self advocacy is you kind, we kind of do that on our own, right? Like a life skill, a functional skill, but there's also this whole self-advocacy role where students can be involved and should be involved with their IEPs. So what do you do with your students leading up to the IEP meeting to get them set up for success? So do you do, like, do you have specific lessons or activities or do you do preparation or what does that look like for you?

Speaker 2:

Yeah, so to me, um, honestly my first year I, I had no idea what I was doing completely honest. Like I didn't think kids should even mean my, like that just for adults to talk about and living in the south. Um, it's very like a subject still to have an IEP. So when I came across this idea of equipping students to

advocate for themselves and in the IEP meeting and was like, wait, was parents actually more like, I know it's required for transitional students, but like when I think they're nine years old on average. So I feel like, you know, some parents are very on board and some are like, you gotta protect my little baby, but you, that baby is some gonna be. So that's kind of just some background on, um, you know, it's a, it's a, it's a topic I've had grip with parents.

Speaker 2:

Um, so of course I always have their input and their, you know, stamp of approval if you will. Um, because they technically can't excuse their child, if you don't have to participate with my, so I always ask the parents first, like, Hey, what do you think about this? And, you know, after third grade and I, our school system, the student transition to a new school. So it's kind of a good point where they can start being more aware of the process so that when they do transitions in fourth grade, they can go to their teachers and say, Hey, I really learned best when you read aloud while I call or something of that nature. So that's kind of how I broke it with parents first. Then I talk to the students and I say, I kind of explained the like in a child way. So, Hey, um, Stephanie, you know, you know how you are not reading class and you try to go with a, so pace with me and some other students that's, and I kind of explain your exceptionality and like why they learn differently, um, why some things are harder for them, but then I also always bring it back to what they're really good at their strengths.

Speaker 2:

And so I walk through like, you, you have, um, dyslexia, so you sometimes, you know how you say the letters get jumbled your head. And it just, it gets silly confusing when you're reading that cause dyslexia. And some kids know that sometimes no idea this might be the first time they said or said explicitly to them about their ability. So whatever it may be, I try to explain their exceptionality in an appropriate way, but harping on their strengths, in what they're good at and how we can help them learn better with some tools. So I'll use the word accommodation or, and, and give them the correct vocabulary, the, the correct terminology. So, you know how you take tests with me and I pull you out. I pull on my upsetting for assess, know that that's not, I say, yeah, you take tests with me and you know how we go in a small group.

Speaker 2:

So I'm explaining it in terms of our daily schedule. And I say, yeah's because, you know, sometimes you have trouble focusing. And so you might take some, the kids take medication or, you know, have different things that are already aware of at home. Um, you know, and you have trouble focusing. So I pull you in a small group, you take your test in a small group and you get extra time and that's not a bad thing. It just means you have the most amount of time to do your best. Um, so, you know, when you come in here, you have to keep working because sometimes you just get a little distracted and that's honestly, that's not a bad thing. That's just, you know, you were wired. So I always explain it and come back to, it's not a bad thing. It's, it's a good thing.

Speaker 2:

You're just different. And you're unique. And everyone has their strengths and weaknesses. Um, if a child is kind of, I don't know, very sensitive or a little put off by the idea that they're a little unique or different in some way, I talk about students in our class. You know, this student is really good at baseball and they, you know, for home loans all the time, but they might struggle in find whatever, whatever the case may be. And I try to make sure they don't feel excluded or left out in some way. So, you know, I

have a caseload about 11 students into 12 on average. So we talk about it, you know, in its group setting, usually about two to three that have similar needs that way. It's not like a singled out kind, uh, made me more awkward kind of meeting. Just, I worry about what they're feeling.

Speaker 2:

I worry that they're gonna feel singled out or weird or different in a bad way. And I'm not that at all. Right. So I want them to feel like, and it's a good thing, and it's, it's not a less thing, you know, need, so I'll do that, um, for about a couple weeks prior to the IEP. So when they go, you know, we have these like 30 minute sessions with two or three students, one may have an IEP upcoming, but not all of them, but they're still hearing it. And they're participating in that small self-advocacy group. And so that's kind how I get them into it without, oh, we're having a meeting with all your teachers and your parents and every, you know, they just kinda get used to it. Yeah. So I'll do it like once a week, every other week with a different set of, so if they, it becomes a regular occurrence year, all year long.

Speaker 2:

And so when it comes time to their annual, I, they're not like let's wait. You know? So, um, as far as preparation goes, I will have a child from me, version of IEP, just a little more simplified as far as like the accommodation, um, the state not make conform easy to read degree. So I kind of just take the jargon out of it, but still give them most accommodations. I need extra time. I need a highlighter and we'll practice them presenting what accommodations they use in class. So for example, if you know, has dyslexia, but she also has ADHD or of some sort, then I will say her, you know, we kind role play SU tell me how you take a test and she'll explain, you know, I go in this room and I smaller group, so I can focus. I also use a highlighter when I'm testing to kind of underline key information and stay focused on what we're reading.

Speaker 2:

And so my main goal for my level, um, age range of my students is to have them present their accommodations. Um, if nothing else, they really enjoy that part. And they seem to really enjoy, um, the aspect of the IEP. So depending on how, uh, outgoing they're and kinda the personality I'll have them, I love that. It's, it's like a, okay, I'm really good at this, but I need this to succeed. And so they get both sides and typically they won't stay for the entire IEP meeting just depending. Um, they don't wanna miss their entire afternoon, but so trying to get them to present their they're good at their strong areas, if you will. And, um, so that, part's usually pretty easy for them to harp on, but, and catch on to, but at presenting, they're what I need and saying, I need statements. I, that, that's what they need to be able to do. That's self <inaudible>.

Speaker 1:

I love that so much. And I was, if you saw me like looking over here, I was taking notes because there were so many things that I love. And I didn't wanna forget to mention all of them. I, I love that you ask parents and you have conversations with the parents prior. I think that's so important because they are not our child, right? Like, yes, we are their, their teacher, but ultimately we don't get to make those decisions for that child. If a, if a parent is like, no, I don't want my child to have this conversation, or I don't want them to be a part of it. That's the family's decision. And we have to honor that. So I love that you talk to parents about it. I think that's so important and absolutely should be the first step. I also love that you use the correct terminology, like accommodations with them because you know, that quote

that they say, I, if a kid can read the word Tyran, SOS, Rex, they can read the word, or if they can understand what the word Tyran SOS Rex means.

Speaker 1:

Like that's a huge word. That's a big word for kids to be able to read and understand they can read and understand more than they let on most of the time. So we should be using the correct terminology. We shouldn't be babying it down, quote, air quotes, right? For them to be able to give them those self advocacy skills, they need to know what an accommodation is and what the different parts of the IEP are so that they can self advocate for each part of it. So I love that so much. I also love that you do small group instruction, no matter. And a student has an IEP meeting coming up so that they're always getting that Intel and that just group setting. So they're not feeling singled out. They see all of their friends there. They're all learning from one another at the same time.

Speaker 1:

I love that so much. And then the last thing, this is the last thing that I wanna say, and then we'll keep going. I love that you have, so you don't, you not only teach them what their accommodations are, but you talk to them about why they need them and how they can self advocate for them. So I need a highlighter because, or this is how I use this accommodation of using a highlighter. Like that is so important. And I, if, if you you're listening, as you're listening to this and you're thinking about, you know, oh my gosh, that just seems like such a big step. Or my kids can't do it back to the whole, like T-Rex analogy. Kids will surprise you and they can do so much more than they ever let on. So teach them how to do it. And I promise you, they will come through with it. Well, we talked about what leading up to the IEP meeting looks like. We talked about how your students interact at the IEP meeting with you with the rest of the IEP team. So I'm then self advocacy into the I, and if you do where you put this within the I IEP.

Speaker 2:

So depending on the student, um, and kind of their natural strengths. So I think it, it really does depend on where their strengths lie. Um, I do have some students who have a social or behavioral objectives in their IEP. And so that is typically where I'll kind of put those self advocacy goals. Um, as far as, you know, my bubbly personality just likes to talk all day kind of people. Um, those students they're naturally stronger at it, so I don't make it a, an actual IP objective, but I let them participate and, and encourage them to persuade. Because like I said, especially with the way our elementaries are split, when they get to fourth grade, not saying they wanna a special ed teacher and they won have advocates, you know, in their, in their circle of influence, but they need to know that, Hey, I used this and I really do need that because it helps me, um, whatever that accommodation may be, especially at the beginning of the year, I feel like personally I'm so just like beginning of your stress, but the student tells me, I need my highlighter before we do this, I need, you know, a quieter space, whatever it may be, not tell who they really do need it, cuz they're aware.

Speaker 2:

Um, and that's another thing. Kids are so much more observant than we kind assume they are. So they know they touch with me every day. So every day we have an assessment, they touch with me. They know they get time and a half for extra time on their assessments and they get extra time on their writing assignments typically. So they're not naive. They just may not have the vocabulary to articulate it to you. Um, so they, they already know the, to, with,

Speaker 1:

And comes back to using the correct language with them, letting them know that this is an accommodation. And I think that it's so important and I love that you said they, they know, they just might not know how to verbalize what they need. So we have to teach them. And that's true with even adults, you know? So we don't know how to explain how we feel or we're not sure how to word a certain sentence. Like that's, that's an everybody, I don't wanna say a problem, but everybody deals with that, but we have just the special education teachers. We have this ability and this opportunity to teach kids how to advocate for themselves and make them just shine really and be very independent. And I'm, I'm so here for this. Well, I love that you also brought up back to school and um, so I wanna ask you this question. So if a teacher wanted to give this a try in the classroom, what are your top two or three things that you think they should keep in mind when they go to start it?

Speaker 2:

So first, um, typically I would suggest talking to the family or parents first, um, kind of like we said, you know, that's the second respect thing. I, I would want my personal child to learn that she needs, she needs her a, she needs her like, and she needs to do certain activities specifically, but not everyone has the same opinion or world like make, um, some people, you know, kind of shelter their child. Well, they feel comfortable. So of course kind verbal permission as far as broaching the topics with the student, um, making sure their, their parents or their guardians are okay with that, making sure their adults are on the same page is, is crucial. Um, so after that kind, you know, discuss with the parents, then I would move on to making it a routine and not just a one time event or a one time discussion or, you know, kinda like we have in our schedule a time where we work on IEP goals.

Speaker 2:

So I pick a day the week typically Fridays, cuz those are kind flex activity, whatever we need more help on. We do on Friday. So I'll pull, you know, three seniors at a time and I'll set a rotation. So the school year I've had between 10 and 12 students. So when I had 12 students, I did a group of three every four weeks. So, or excuse me, a group of three. And then they saw me once a month down average, like they saw me every four weeks. So, you know, I kind of just made it part of our regular routine and that made it easier as far as making sure they were ready and comfortable with the topic before we went to the, if that makes sense.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. I think that so one is making sure the parents are on board and we're respecting the boundaries there if parents want, or don't want us to have the conversations with the student and two was making sure it's scheduled and it's routine. I love that. Do you have a third one?

Speaker 2:

Yeah. So the third thing, I think again, depends on the age of the student and kinda the functioning level as well. You know, so taking, I would suggest starting with strengths and needs start there. You know, if, if they can say I'm a friend, I'm a good friend, something as simple as I that and may be really meaningful to the IEP team, especially with parents. Um, I think about, you know, one of my lower functioning students who are very they're awesome friends, they're sweet, they care for their friends. They take care of them and they may not say like as you know, eloquently or as drawn out as we would describe them. But hearing them say that as a parent, I know it makes a lot. So having them focus on strengths. And so in, depending on the student, depending on where their needs are, I might using their

accommodation list. I get extra time. I need a small group so I can focus kinda from there. So starting with strengths, the good at, and then moving on I need. And if you, you know, ideally I need, cause I need extra time. Cause I have, I have as simple as that, but then you really get the power behind.

Speaker 1:

I think that's a great starting place I need, I want, I feel, and then once they're able to verbalize that or share that and communicate that then add in though, because

Speaker 2:

Yeah,

Speaker 1:

I love that progression. So that, I mean, if that in itself is like the best advice ever for students with self advocacy because our students are all on different levels. They all have different support needs. Some students right off the bat will be able to say, I need a drink of water because I'm thirsty or I need a highlighter because it helps me see the words better or however they wanna verbalize it. But some of our other students might just think I need an eraser and that's okay. That's where they're starting. So that I let is the, can you top that? Cause that's my last question. What is your best piece of advice for teaching students self-advocacy skills?

Speaker 2:

Um, I guess my best piece is really just going back to students, you know, what they need. So if I have a student with autism, they will naturally need a little more assistance, you know, more often than not with that self. That's typically part of their IEP. Um, as I, as I inherit it in third grade, so that in and of itself, you know, just looking at the individual student and what they need and really back there because individualized education plan, not a blanket education plan, yes. Covers all students and all disabilities, not the purpose. So again, just going back to the individual student, wherever their ages, wherever their functioning level is, you know, are mature. All those variables that will change depending on the student and kind of also their family and their desires. They may, I've had parents say, okay, you can, you can have, we can have them participate in the IEPs, but you know, we're not gonna, we're not gonna focus on their, their differences. I wanna focus on strengths, you know? And so some students may never to that know in a bunch of other factors, but being able to focus on I'm really good at being a good listener or their strengths. I mean that, that put the confidence boost. So I think again, being, bringing it back to the individual and focusing on strengths at that student,

Speaker 1:

Absolutely IEPs are not one size fits all. So we need to make sure that they are individualized. And that also comes into play with lesson planning and adapting lessons and what self advocacy skills you're gonna be teaching students. It's not a big blanket lesson. It's not a big blanket IEP, it's one size fits all. So just make, I think that's great advice. And that is like, that should be taught at every level of every school and college. Like just make sure everything is individualized and nothing is blanket. I love that so much. Well, thank you Bri so much for being here today and sharing about how to teach self advocacy to students and really aligning it with the IEP and the IEP meeting. So passionate about this topic. So I'm so glad you were here to share it before we go, though, will you please share where viewers can find you, whether that's a website, social media or email, and I can put all of the links for Brin's things below this video, so you can click and go.

Speaker 2:

Yeah. So, um, you can find me on Instagram, a different, or excuse me, different dot. Um, the taglines is a different standard of special patient. So that's where I'm at that I hang out. And, uh, that's actually where I found you and your, your YouTube long ago.

Speaker 1:

<laugh> well awesome. I will. Link's Instagram here below. So if you wanna talk more about self advocacy, see, or, um, having students come into the IEP meeting and share about student led IEPs and all of that, please reach out to her via Instagram. Again, the link is below. Thank you again, Brin so much for being here. I have loved this conversation. I could talk for hours about self advocacy and all of those things. Um, but we'll end it here. So thank you again so much for being here. Thank y'all for being here so much and learning more about teaching student self advocacy. We will see y'all in the next training.