

Stephanie:

Hey, everyone. My name is Stephanie and I'm the founder of The Intentional IEP and your host of all of these amazing guest speaker chats here at TII. I am here today with Jessica and we are going to be talking all about transition, not necessarily the transition plans that we're writing into IEPs for students who are 16 or 14, depending on where you live, but the students that are transitioning from one building to the next, maybe elementary moving into middle school, junior high to senior high, or middle school to junior high, things like that.

Stephanie:

But before we get started, Jessica, please introduce yourself, share your educational experience and your role at the IEP table.

Jessica:

All right, awesome. So like you said, my name is Jessica Reed. I am a middle school ELA resource teacher, so I teach sixth through eighth grade and I get to do all the fun things. I have been a special ed teacher probably about three fourths of my career as a teacher, and I think I'm hitting up about 13 years maybe. I lost track a while ago, I just keep going.

Jessica:

Other cool things about me is I hopefully will have a book out coming next year, called the Collaborative [inaudible 00:01:07] through [Edgy Match 00:01:08] about co-teaching and collaboration, so that's kind of fun, and that's pretty much it. My job at the IEP round table is usually the IEP case manager and so a lot of times I have either served as the one writing the IEP, which like I was telling you earlier, I still can always use help writing, because we always need to be improving upon that and making it easier to read and understand.

Jessica:

Or, I have this past year, it's actually been kind of interesting, I have served as like a liaison between the elementary school and the middle school, giving the parents some ideas on what to expect when their child comes to middle school. Because that is very scary to go from elementary to all of a sudden... It's all these different changes.

Stephanie:

Completely different, and we were talking about that before, because we have another chat about co-teaching and we were talking about this transition, and I was like, well, it's so different. Elementary school is so different from middle school. So that's what brought us here for this chat today, so let's get started.

Stephanie:

We have a couple of questions and we might wing it a little bit, but welcome. So, how do you recommend reaching out and collaborating with the next year's teacher?

Jessica:

Okay, so there's two options. If you are a parent and you know that your child is going to be maybe going from fifth to sixth grade, you could always reach out to their current case manager and say, "Hey, I

really would like to possibly talk to the lead. Can I possibly talk to someone at that school who's going to answer my questions?" Because a lot of the times, elementary teachers aren't going to know what middle school teachers do during the day, and vice versa for high school. Because there is that transition from eighth to high school, depending on where you are. So, if you can reach out.

Jessica:

Now, if you are a teacher, my biggest suggestion is actually getting in contact with, or having someone in your department attend those IEP meetings, because it helps with that transition. So when we have the kids coming, I'm not looking at the paper, going, "Oh, sweet Jesus. How much do we got going on next year?" You know what I mean? Because a lot of times, just because you see a kid's label is SLD for a specific learning disability, you don't really know a kid. So if you get to go to the IEP meeting or you can split it amongst your group, if you can get to know the kid, you always are more familiar when they come in.

Jessica:

And that also starts to build that rapport with the parent of, hey, they're not going to be thrown out to the wasteland. They are going to have somebody here at school. And you can start to build that rapport and I feel like a lot of times it gives parents that security of knowing that their kid's just not totally... Because about this time, you think when you're at the end of elementary school, you usually have had the same case manager, because I mean, we're typically a lot smaller than general ed teachers, the numbers. And so, your kid's going to be known by all the special ed teachers. Do you know what I mean? So you have that connection to somebody.

Jessica:

So it's very, very scary for some of those kids when they come over. I already have a seventh grade parent being like, "You're going to go to high school? Can we just make it through eighth grade right now? Let's just get to the next grade." We'll talk about it next year because while I attend the fifth grade, I do have parents who are like, "My God, my kid's going to high school."

Jessica:

So I think if you're just reaching out and asking, it just builds that good rapport and you start that dynamic of, hey, we're all on the team together, if that makes any sense.

Stephanie:

It does, yes. Well, so now I think the big question is, how do you find out what the differences are? What the changes are from a child's current school to the next school year? And like we said, elementary school functions so different than middle school, and middle school functions so differently than high school. But as an elementary school teacher, I might not know what's going on at the middle school. I know that's where they're going, but I don't know what that looks. How do I figure all that out?

Jessica:

So if you are an elementary school teacher and you are going to be writing IEPs for the upcoming school year for middle school, my best suggestion would be to reach out to whoever ... Ask your lead teacher, "Hey, can you ask so-and-so, what does their day look like?" Because one of the biggest things that we have is, in elementary school, they get two and a half hours for reading. That's reading plus language

arts. Doesn't happen here, at least it doesn't... We have seven periods and we have 50 minutes to do two subjects in the one class. And a lot of times, that throws parents for a loop, because they're like, "I don't understand."

Jessica:

Or, our service model is, we have co-teaching or we have resource, and resource, we still do the exact same stuff, it's just in a smaller group model. Where in elementary school, the resource room seems to be like they're in the whole group and then they get pulled [crosstalk 00:06:08]. It's a little different, the service model. The kid's still getting served in the best way that the team deems, it's just a different ... So the biggest thing is if you're a teacher and you're like, "I have no idea what this looks like," just reach out to another person at your elementary or at your middle school.

Jessica:

Maybe it's different if you're in... I think of Cobb County in Georgia, where it's massive.

Stephanie:

It's huge.

Jessica:

So that may be one of their things that you even ask your guidance counselor, "Hey, can you help me find so-and-so," because it's a little different here where there's only, I'm in a system where there's four schools. So we all kind of know each other, so as a parent, and I can see myself doing this if my daughter still has a speech IEP, you don't want to be that nosy Nancy. But if you're not the one who advocates for your child and find out, then who's going to do it? You know what I mean?

Stephanie:

I think in smaller school districts, like when I worked in Texas, the district that I worked in, it was a bigger district, but it was smaller in terms of like it wasn't Houston ISD. But we had feeder schools. So my students from fourth grade, we already knew what school they were going to based off where they lived for middle school and maybe there was like one or two middle school teachers, life skills teachers, at the middle school.

Stephanie:

So we would always just email both of them and fill them both in and ask and so I ended up having a rapport with both of them. But my class actually ended up feeding into two different middle schools, so I had to reach out to both but I mean, it was just as simple as figuring out who was going to be there next year, sending an email and being like, "How does this look in your school?" It's so different.

Jessica:

Well, now I'm speaking from the inclusion perspective. Our teacher who does our life skills, she has a great rapport. They have their own thing going on. She's definitely in her element. She's fantastic. She's already made that connection to the parents. I think she reached out back in March to start introducing because you have to. There's so much transition and there's so many of our kids who struggle with transition in general.

Jessica:

So this can be one of those things that you can build that rapport and unfortunately with COVID, our fifth graders couldn't come over so they did like a sixth grade meeting night where, when I've gone into the meetings, I've told the parents like, "Hey, if you want to begin at the end of the summer, holler at me, we will go on a tour." I'll give them a tour. Because I think a lot of it is like, "Hey, can I go on a tour of the school before?" So then the kid knows where specifically where to go and where not to go because you don't want to end up on the eighth grade hallway and feel like a little sixth grader. You know what I mean?

Jessica:

Or like, "Hey, how do I do a locker combination?" That's a big deal. Or, "Hey, can I get a key?" And do you like a key lock combination? And a lot of times I've actually sat in meetings before where I've been like, "Put that in the meeting notes that they need a lock combin-," a key [inaudible 00:09:37]. Or like, "Hey, they need to have access to the elevator." Because you don't know if you see a kid, "Why are you on the elevator?"

Jessica:

If they have a disability, like maybe they have a knee problem, they have the right to have up and down the elevator. So it's just like even simple stuff you take for granted that those kids don't know because once they've been at a school for, if you're K through five, you're there all the time. So it's just simple things.

Jessica:

Or even asking like, "Hey, if you know a parent has a student who maybe has a behavior issue, meet with a tea-," and I know it's a pain sometimes as a teacher because you don't want to meet with them but in the end it helps because you're pre-planning and pre-planning. I've got so much I've got to do. But meeting with that parent and starting that rapport like, "Hey, I'm so excited for little Johnny to be in my class."

Jessica:

And that way the parent can go ahead and tell you all their struggles, especially coming to middle school. It kind of gives you a great way. My only thing though that I hate about when people go into transition is because every year, do you know this? And if you're a teacher, if you're a good teacher, you know this. You should not base the child based off of their last year's experience. You just shouldn't.

Jessica:

And so a lot of times when you have those conversations, you have to take them with a grain of salt because if someone's saying that so-and-so did something bad in their classroom, they may not do it for you. It just may be the relationship they have with them. So you kind of always have to take everything... You can't use the rose colored glasses, I guess.

Stephanie:

That's great advice though, and I mean, even for school year to school year, I think that that's fabulous advice. And I always say, "Every day is a new day. Don't take yesterday's baggage into today when you're in the classroom because no two days are ever the same. They're always different."

Stephanie:

So I think that that's great advice also moving in from different schools too. Well, what should teachers, special education teachers, keep in mind in terms of a student transitioning from school to school? You mentioned the locker things, but what other things in terms of services and supports written into an IEP maybe should we be wary of, or ask about that we may know about?

Jessica:

So I think a lot of times we, and I say that a lot apparently when I talk to other people, a lot of times, it's always funny to hear yourself. One of the things that I struggle with is that the lingo from state to state is so different. A friend of mine was just looking at a Pennsylvania IEP and it was like, "I have no idea how to read this." Or in Alabama, where if you look at my daughter, if you look at an IEP, they actually list this danger that the kids covered, where some places don't have any lists of standards, you just give the work signals.

Jessica:

So I wish there were maybe just being able to understand the lingo a little more better and that's not a teacher problem, that's IEP writing problem. You must like our programs, because there's not a consistent program that everybody uses.

Jessica:

One of the other things is honestly looking at their services. If you have a student who maybe, you're in seventh grade. You teach seventh grade and they're coming from Arkansas and they have resource ELA, they have resource math, they have inclusion math, inclusion language arts. As the teacher, especially if you're their case manager, you need to reach out to someone at that school or ask your lead to do it, or ask your special ed director like, "Hey, they've got all these services. I don't know how to start with the kid. I don't know how to do it," because a lot of times you do have to take those out of state documents and put them into your own. Or at least here you have to transfer it to Georgia.

Jessica:

And ask, "Hey, does this kid need resourced?" Or, "Does this get me an inclusion?" They have both, how did you best serve them? Because I feel like if you can have an honest conversation with someone who knows the student, you're going to be a lot better.

Stephanie:

I think that's a really good point.

Jessica:

One thing that we've done this year that I really like is our eighth graders because transitioning to high school is such a big deal. We have actually gone in and we've updated IPs so that we hopefully wouldn't have any IPs that would be due August, September, October. Because that's not fair as a case manager to get a kid who's IEP is due September 1st and you've had them for what? Two weeks? How are you going to know what that student's going to need compared to someone like... I just had to do that for a student. His IEP was due in August 31st and I have resit his IEP and we changed some things to meet his needs and they all going and looking forward to high school because it made sense, but I also knew the

student. And so hopefully whoever has this case manager next year will be a lot better nail then in September, if that makes any sense.

Stephanie:

I think that that's a really important thing to keep in mind too, and not just for student transitioning from school to school or anything, but when is this IEP going to fall next year? And really looking at that because it's really difficult to write an on a kid that you don't know anything about. Transfer IEPs are one thing, but just even year to year coming in. And one thing that... I've been reading up on parent perspectives of special ed services, and one thing that's recommended to parents in this one book that I read was for students who have IEPs that are due in November, December, January, it's middle of the school year. How can you predict what your child's going to be doing after the rest of this school year, a whole summer, and then again in the fall?

Stephanie:

So they recommend coming back, I guess kind of having like an amendment IEP meeting, at the end of the school year. And then again at the beginning of the school year, after a couple of weeks to see, is this IEP that we did last November of 2020 really going to work for us in October of 2021 because it's so different?

Stephanie:

So I think that that's a really good thing to be mindful of is just when is this IEP going to fall in terms of the next school year?

Jessica:

I think some people tend to forget that. I think that's great. I think some people tend to forget that the IEP, I always describe it as like a living, breathing document because at any point the whole purpose is for us to come back together and it's on what's working, what's not for the kid. Because like what you're saying, what's going to work in August is not going to work in November. It's like behavior modification stuff, just because it works one day does not mean it's going to work the next.

Stephanie:

And you can have amendment IEP meetings at any time. You can have as many as you need, it doesn't matter. You could have an amendment IEP meeting every week. Hopefully that's not happening, something's wrong with the IEP team at that point. I mean, you could essentially, you could have an IEP amendment every month and if something's not working or you want to try something else. Just because you write it in at the annual IEP meeting, doesn't mean that that's what's set in stone for the next whole year. So I think that that's a really good tip to bring up. I love it.

Jessica:

I do think when you're writing, especially if you know you have kids that possibly... if you have a transient kid coming in and out, is to write it where people can understand it because a lot of times we get, especially like... I know when I graduated from my master's program, my IEP was all full of all this jargon and stuff. Nobody can understand that, you know what I mean? It was great. I got really good grades on my doc IEPs, [inaudible 00:17:25] IEPs but a parent's not going to be able to understand that. And if you don't have that information to back it up, one thing that I think is really important when you

have the IEP, especially if you have someone who is going to transfer, it's really important because the IEP is supposed to give this, everyone should know this, give this broad overview of the child, the good and the bad. More good, hopefully, than bad because we always want to have a positive spin on things.

Jessica:

But if you don't have that information, like the psych report, or just even recent testing to where you can explain, why does this child... If you're saying that they're average and everything, why do they need [inaudible 00:18:05]?

Stephanie:

It all should [crosstalk 00:18:08].

Jessica:

Yeah, like connect the dot. So I think that's a lot of struggle that if you don't have those things, and it could be something that the parent could be like, if the child's in seventh grade, "Hey, they haven't been tested in three years." I would like for them to see that growth. I actually had that recently happen where a student hasn't been tested since second grade because they bypassed him in elementary school. So you can get tested every other time.

Jessica:

And I was talking to the mom and I was like, "We need to get tested." As a teacher, I need to know more direct because I don't feel like the IEP is as effective as it could be because we don't have that information. So those are things like when you go from fifth to sixth grade, a lot of times I think parents tend to forget because they're just so nervous about middle school or even from school to school that your IEP and the parents should know what's in the IEP. The parents should understand that it's very user friendly, if that makes sense.

Stephanie:

So as you were talking, I was thinking, I would imagine that even the jargon that we use in elementary might be a little different in middle school. Just so even writing it in terms of that, and the jargon may be used in middle school into high school.

Jessica:

Sorry.

Stephanie:

You're okay.

Jessica:

But no, I mean, I completely understand because there's so much... I mean, I haven't taught elementary in seven years, so I couldn't tell you [crosstalk 00:19:52].

Stephanie:

I have not taught middle school in 7 year, so I wouldn't even... So I love that advice, I think it's really important. Not only just for the parents to be able to understand the IEP, but just the transferring from if you have a transient kid, like you said, that's moving all the time or moving to another school or just making sure that your verbiage is user-friendly and not just for you but for everyone else on the IEP team as well. I think that's really important.

Stephanie:

Well, what is your best piece of advice then for writing an IEP for a student that may be transitioning into a different school?

Jessica:

That's a loaded question. I think my best piece of advice is any time you're writing an IEP is to really know your kid, to authentically know your student. Because of course I waited till the last minute. Our last day of school is Thursday and so I've had all my meetings, I've just not uploaded all of my documents like I should have because... I mean, I've got all my paperwork but just haven't done it and it's funny when you read some of the IEPs because you can honestly think about a kid and be like, "Oh, yeah." Or, "Ooh, what was I thinking?" Like I need to redo that.

Jessica:

And so I was reading one that I had written and I'm getting a little teary-eyed because my eighth graders are graduating tomorrow and I talked to a parent earlier and I was like, "You got to stop. I got to cry." Because this is my first group of six through eighth grade that I've consistently had because last year I didn't get to see any of them because of COVID.

Jessica:

And I was very now I was like, "Oh my God, he's grown so much. It's ridiculous." And when we write IEPs,, I know people who don't and I don't mean to get to teary-eyed, but I'm going to get teary-eyed tomorrow. I know people who don't see our kids and even if a kid is just SLD, specific learning disability. To have them... I had a kid recently retest and he's doing great in reading. Psychology, he's doing great in reading. And his mom... And sometimes I don't think special ed teachers get the recognition that we do and we need, and his mom was like, "He's done huge since he's been in your class." And I'm like, "Oh good because I don't think he does anything in my class." He just kind of stares at me sometimes.

Jessica:

But you know what? It's just like if you can read the IEP and authentically know the child, then you've done your job. And that sometimes takes forever to do and it's an art. And unfortunately, I'm not... I think I'm okay at writing IEPs, I can always improve. I think IEPs are something you can always improve in. But you want the parent to be able to look at the IEP and be like, "This is my child," because especially... I saw something, and I don't know if it was in your group or where I was, maybe it was during the master IEP course where I was talking about parent involvement. What should you use those parent? The parent is just an active committee member, as you are.

Stephanie:

Amen. [crosstalk 00:23:21].

Jessica:

Know what I mean? So what the parent says should matter.

Stephanie:

It does matter.

Jessica:

And I know we have some parents who talk a big show and then they don't follow through. I mean, there are some parents who know their stuff and who are her very authentically true with you and are like, "These are my concerns for my child. How are you going to help them?" That's the purpose of this IEP.

Jessica:

My mom recently is a retired special ed teacher and she has started working as an advocate where we live. And she was like, "I'm not going there. Maybe when I retire. My is going to be in that school system. Not going there. I'm already that crazy mama. I don't need to be added to the much more of a crazy mama."

Jessica:

But I think, because last time I told you, I give really good gifts. I'm not being behold, but I give really good gifts.

Stephanie:

I love you.

Jessica:

I'm glad I can make you laugh, at least I stopped from trying to cry. So she was telling me how the parents were sitting there and this teacher is like, "Yeah, he's doing great. He's doing great." The child is two and is autistic and you are telling me that he has behavior issues. But when we have the IEP meeting, they're like, "Oh, he's fine. He's doing great. Why is my child being sent to an autistic?" Or, "Why isn't my child being referred for behavior services?" When you're magically telling me, "Oh, he's great."

Stephanie:

There's a disconnect somewhere.

Jessica:

You have to be, especially... And I guess this goes back to transition. And when my mom's told me that, I was like, "Did you laugh?" And she said, mom was just like... I mean, my mom is one that is, excuse my language, a no bullshitter. I'm very blessed to have her as my mother, but she doesn't take crap, she just doesn't, especially in special ed stuff. She was very much the teacher who... We had a conversation, my brother had an IEP for years and she was telling me that this speech language therapist, when my brother was a senior, was like, "He doesn't need services anymore." My mom said, "Oh yes, he does."

You can go ahead and be working on your interview skills with him. He still qualifies." When they were starting to, and she was like, mm-mm (negative).

Stephanie:

That's great. That's actually, this is completely off topic here but like SLP, we could be working on interview skills. I mean, that's a functional skill. And I love... Yes.

Jessica:

I mean, I wouldn't want to be in SLP to save my life. I can't do mixed stuff. I can't look at mail. I mean, my daughter, Nell, she'll say, "There's the bir"" And I'm like, "Bird, duh." And she'll go, "Bir-duh," right back at me, mini version of me.

Stephanie:

Like Bambi.

Jessica:

Yes, except she looks just like her daddy and she is a mess, but it was just funny because when... It's very interesting when you're a teacher and then when you also have a kid who has an IEP, and I'm sure there are several people who will listen to this that are the same way, because you read it and you're like, "Oh, okay. I didn't know that about..."

Jessica:

I think my daughter's IEP said that she liked pink and white and she liked playing something. And I was like, "Did you ask her this?" And the teacher was like, "This is what she said." I was like, "Oh, okay." I think it was like, she liked to watch something and I was like, "I don't think we've ever watched that, but okay." Anyway, it was just really interesting because you don't want the parents to be completely surprised when they read the IEP and you don't want the teachers, like if you're going from fifth to sixth grade to be like, "What the heck did you just say to me?"

Stephanie:

Yeah, that's great. Yeah. For real, I think that's super important. Any grade.

Jessica:

It's really, really important that you do make some kind of connection because those parents, bless them, when they come to middle school, those kids are so... It's so funny to see the middle schoolers or sixth graders when they first get here because their eyes are just like deer in headlights. They're just going, "Yeah, I'm supposed to change my class seven times?" Or, "I've got a locker," or, "I've only got three minutes to go in between classes."

Jessica:

And elementary school teachers don't spoonfeed or any of that kind of stuff.

Stephanie:

It's just a huge change and those are just things that we don't do. We don't switch classes and it takes three minutes to switch. We have transitions within the class and you don't walk to a different classroom for a different subject to teach and have a different teacher for every subject. And those are all things that we need to be aware of when we're writing the next IEP is like, what skills can we write into this IEP that's going to get them ready for middle school, get them ready for high school? In addition to things that they should be working on that they're currently struggling with. It's just really important to think of all those things.

Stephanie:

So thank you so much for sharing all of that and just thank you so much for being a guest speaker to talk all about transitioning into different schools because it's so different. Even just thinking about it, I'm like, "Man, that just sounds so stressful." But I think it's so important that we have these conversations because unless you're actually teaching the upper elementary kids that are transitioning to middle school, you don't think about those things and it's something that we should be aware of when we're writing IEPs.

Jessica:

And it's one of those, I couldn't write a self-contained IEP. I don't know what... I couldn't tell you what life skills I would think. That's not my area of expertise, so that's a whole nother layer. If your child's going to go to that type of classroom, what is that relationship? What is that expectation going to look like? What inclusion are they going to go? Are they going to get to go to the special with other kids? Just all of those services to some things.

Stephanie:

They look different too and what resource looks like in elementary, it looks very different in high school or middle school. And what push and inclusion or pull out inclusion looks different than what it looks like in middle school and co-teaching is so different. So I think it's really important to know those continuums of support and continuums of services to know what is this what we're suggesting to finish out the school year here going to look like in middle school? And you can't really plan for that unless you have conversations with the next year's teacher or at least somebody from that school.

Stephanie:

So again, thank you so much for sharing all of this knowledge with us. Thank you so much for being a guest speaker again, for the intentional IEP. And please share with us where we can find you online and on social media. And then again, guys, I will link all of Jessica's things below this video, so you can go find her.

Jessica:

Okay, so I'm back alive on Instagram, randomly. My Instagram is @jlreed2014. I'm presenting at the ETE Teacher Reboot Conference, that's in July. It's one of my many. My Twitter, which is what I'm most active on is @kentuckygirlinalabama, KYgirlinalabama. And I have a TikTok, I don't do anything on it though. I just watch the TikToks because they're funny. And that's it.

Stephanie:

And you have a book coming out soon.

Jessica:

I do, and I have been on several podcasts lately, just talking about Collaboration and all that good stuff, and that is on my website, which I will send you the link. And it's just, I've got presentations, I've got videos, podcasts, any and everything I've done is on there.

Stephanie:

Awesome. Again guys, I will link all of the things for Jessica below, so if you want to reach out to her for more advice or tips or just pick her brain about something middle school, please reach out to her. She is your expert in this field. And thank you again. She's like, "oh." But thank you so much for being here again today. I so appreciate it. I hope the viewers enjoyed listening to this.

Stephanie:

And if you're watching, I hope you enjoy our banter back and forth, our faces we make back and forth to each other. But thank you guys so much for being here. Thank you, Jessica. And we will see you in the next chat.