

Stephanie:

Hey everyone, my name is Stephanie. I am the founder of the Intentional IEP and your host here for all of these guest speaker chats at TII. I'm here today with Laine and we are going to be talking all about meaningful goals and benchmarks for this first chat that we have. The next one is super awesome, too, so stay tuned for that. But Laine, please share about you, your teaching experience, and your role at the IEP table.

Laine:

Sure, thanks Stephanie. Thanks everyone for listening. I'm a Transition Specialist. That means that I have my Transition Specialist Endorsement and I'm also a Special Ed Teacher and Curriculum Author. I've been in the field for 13 years now and I've been in my current district for, I'm about to go on my tenth year.

Stephanie:

Wow, that's so awesome. I love it.

Laine:

Yeah.

Stephanie:

I love all of the different things that you do. This is going to be so good. I'm so excited. Let's just dive right in, but before we get started diving in let's talk about the difference between an IEP goal and an IEP benchmark. What are they and how are they different?

Laine:

Benchmarks, I basically describe them as they're the way to break down the IEP goal into manageable and achievable chunks. So every IEP goal will have a few benchmarks and that'll help guide the student and the team to stay on track to reach the goal.

Stephanie:

Yes, so benchmarks, if you don't use that term in your state, similar to objectives, they're kind of different and we won't get into that, but it's essentially the same thing. It's the baby steps. If you think of a stairwell, the baby steps to get you to the overarching bigger annual IEP goal that are going to get you there.

Stephanie:

How do we select IEP goals and benchmarks and where to we begin with all of this?

Laine:

Since my focus is in transition, I always begin with the student's vision for their future. I'll talk about that in a second, but I also wanted to cover data collection and assessments because those are the other two big components that I really take a look at. And I have to say, when I was a new teacher I was really unclear about how to select IEP goals and benchmarks. I don't know about you, but I didn't have a lot of guidance when I started.

Stephanie:

Same.

Laine:

Yeah, I was just like, "Here is your IEP's, have it."

Stephanie:

Yeah.

Laine:

Basically, pretty much right off the bat I was like, "I need to figure out how to collect data so I can get a baseline on my students, otherwise how do I track progress, etc.?" So having a data collection system's really important to get started with. Then, also referring to any assessments that are happening. If it's an evaluation year and there is a transition assessment, a psychology assessment, any type of assessment, you should be using those to write the IEP goals. Then even if it's not an evaluation year, I always like to do some mini informal assessments with my students just prior to the IEP meeting.

Stephanie:

One, I want to add in here, one big thing that we did with the Summer PD series is if you learn anything from that, I hope one of the things you took away from it was when you have that really solid present level, all of your data is in that present level, all of the information you need. You have the parent input statement, the vision statement from the student and the family to lead them through further education employment and independent living, right? That is going to leave you breadcrumbs throughout the rest of the IEP. So, use your present levels to determine what IEP goals you're going to be writing.

Stephanie:

And then from there, from choosing those, you can go into your services and supports. Then you can go into the LRE and the curriculum to use to get there. Write that really rock solid present level and then that really will guide you into what IEP goals to choose.

Laine:

Exactly, yeah. I think that's really important and just having that baseline. You can really start without that.

Stephanie:

No, it's really good to have that. If you are like, "Oh my gosh, I have no idea where to start with data collection," don't forget to check the trainings out. You have intentional data collection in your back pocket to use to get you started with all things data.

Stephanie:

How can we have students help us in choosing their IEP goals and benchmarks?

Laine:

Again, I'm all about the student's vision. I always meet with students at least three weeks, sometimes a month, before an upcoming IEP meeting. We can just chat about their vision. I usually have them fill out an IEP PowerPoint template that I created so that they can just really think about, guide themselves towards creating their vision. Because if you ask a student to write their vision, they're not going to know how to do that, right?

Laine:

So I guide them through some specific questions. Then they'll either type their answers, record a video, record audio, and then they can present in their meeting in some form whatever works best for that student.

Stephanie:

I love that so much. I think it's so important, and not just that transition age, but at any age, even in elementary, to have students included in the IEP meeting.

Laine:

Yeah.

Stephanie:

Oh man, and again, summer PD series, have three or four sessions on this topic, kindergarten kids in their IEP meetings sharing PowerPoints and doing all of those things. So if you have questions about that, go back and check that out because I think it's so important and we can include the students at more than just transition age. That really gives them those self advocacy skills when they get to transition age to be able to help with the vision and make determinations for themselves. I love that you do a PowerPoint. I think that's so powerful.

Laine:

Exactly. Yeah, and then I think it's important to ... This is slightly unrelated, well it's related, but just to be ... I try to explain to my students what is an IEP, why do you have this meeting? Because a lot of them are just show up at the meeting and they have no idea other than that there's a group of people they're talking about them. My students are a bit older, but this would be great if younger students did this, too, where they start to talk about having a disability and why they have an IEP and why it's there to help them. That's part of my process as well.

Stephanie:

I love that so much. We did have those conversations in the summer PD series, so I love that. It's so valuable for any student. I don't think it's just transition age. You definitely have to do it at transition age.

Laine:

Yeah.

Stephanie:

But we can for sure start it sooner. We're already including the students in the transition planning for choosing IEP levels and benchmarks. How can we include the family?

Laine:

I like to ask the family, again, three or four weeks in advance, I just send home a checklist that has different questions across domains of function, so like self determination, can the student identity their disability, do they have goals for themselves, health related questions, financial literacy, technology, household management, locational, all the domains. I'll ask them what the student can presently do and what is a priority for the student at this moment in time.

Laine:

Then once I gather all that data, I identity which areas are strengths for the student, which areas need improvement, whether it's a priority, and then whether it is functionally relevant for right now, and if it's age appropriate. If all those things are checked off, then that could go towards writing a new goal or objective for the upcoming year. That's kind of my process.

Stephanie:

I love that and I'm going to go rogue here like I usually do. What do you do when a student reaches the age of majority? I know legally the child [crosstalk 00:08:18]. Let's just talk about it. Go ahead.

Laine:

Yeah, sure. We always have a student, we discuss what that means with the student and then we have the student sign a form. If they decide they want to include the parent and the family in the process, which they typically do, then they can just sign a form saying that they will have, we call it shared autonomy here in Massachusetts. The language will be different depending on your state, or shared decision making rather. If they agree to that then the family can take part in remaining on the IEP team and having decisions as well.

Stephanie:

I love that. This is something new that I'm learning about because I've never, when I taught at the high school level, I worked with students who didn't qualify for services, for special education services. So, transition is something that I'm learning more about, and age of majority. For those of you who are in elementary, middle school, and you're like, "I have no idea what that means. What does that even mean?" Essentially, and please correct me if I'm wrong, it's when the student reaches age 18 and they become in charge of their education and it's not the parent's decision. I love that you give them the option for shared autonomy.

Laine:

Yes.

Stephanie:

I love that because I know parents are probably freaking out. They're like, "Oh my gosh." So I love that. Oh my gosh I love that so much.

Laine:

Yeah, and we try to describe it to the student like, "Does your family help you with things right now? Are they helping you get to school? Do they help you make decisions? If so, then shared decision making

might be helpful." So generally, students do decide that, but some students, they say, "No, I want to be the decision maker." That's okay, too. We like to give them that choice.

Stephanie:

I love it so much. I can't even say anything other than that, than love it.

Laine:

Yeah, it's different than guardianship, too. That's a different process.

Stephanie:

Well, if you have questions about that there is so much stuff out there. If you have questions about transition you can reach out and we'll get there about reaching out to Laine and all that stuff, but please ask all of the questions. There's so much out there for you to learn more about it. I'm learning more about it, too, with you guys. Don't think that you're like, "Oh my gosh, I'm new here." I'm new here, too. It's fine.

Stephanie:

Well, what is your best piece of advice for selecting meaningful IEP goals and/or benchmarks?

Laine:

I know as Special Ed teachers, our jobs are crazy, crazy busy, and especially as a new teacher. It's hard to even get a moment to stop and think through what you're writing. It's kind of silly advice, but just stop and think first before deciding on goals. You need to reflect on whether it's age appropriate, meaningful, and is it going to lead to the student reaching their vision? Basically you shouldn't just write down some quickly rushing the process. You really need to find some uninterrupted time, stop and think it through, and be methodical as you're planning and writing out these goals. That's what I would say.

Stephanie:

I think that is great advice and, again, I'm just going to reiterate. Your goals come from what you write in the present levels. So definitely take the time to write a really solid present level. I feel like for me, it makes the IEP goal decision much easier because the data leads you to exactly what you should be working on.

Laine:

Right.

Stephanie:

I think that's so important. I love that advice. It is great advice. Well, thank you so much Laine, for coming in to talk about meaningful goals and benchmarks, especially at transition age for our older students. Where can we find you online, if anywhere? And again guys, it's like with any of these videos, I'll share links to Laine or how to contact her below this video.

Laine:

Sure. I'm known as Transition Abilities on all the social media platforms. You can find me at Transition Abilities Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube. Yeah, I'm really, really thankful I got to be a part of that. Thank you so much for including me, Stephanie.

Stephanie:

Yes, thank you so much for doing this. I think this is a great conversation to have. I think a lot of teachers who have never done transition, one question that comes up, and here I am just babbling, but one question that comes up often is switching from middle school or elementary school to teaching high school. They're like, "What do I do? How do I set my classroom up?" You don't even think until you sit down to write an IEP, like, "Oh my gosh, I have to write a transition plan. I've never written a transition plan ever before in my life. What do I do? Where do I start? All of the questions." So, I think that is such a great conversation for everyone to have in their back pocket and to learn more about because you just never know when you might end up teaching high school.

Stephanie:

I do have a question for you that's not on this. It has something to do with this, but do you have links to your checklists and things like that you provide to students and parents that I can include below or anything?

Laine:

Yes. Yeah, I do. I have the PowerPoint outline. I have a link to that and a transition link checklists, and I believe I have the self determination checklist, too. I'll send those to you.

Stephanie:

Awesome. Yes. Guys, check below. They're linked below here. You can go grab them from Laine. If you have any questions please reach out to her. I'm happy to help you with transition. I'm learning, though, with you. I know the basics, but please use Laine as your resource for all things transition because it is her expertise.

Laine:

Thanks so much, Stephanie.

Stephanie:

Yes, thank you so much, Laine, and we will see you guys in the next chat.