

Stephanie:

Hey everyone. My name is Stephanie. I am the founder and your host here at the intentional IEP. And I am here with Melinda and we are gonna be talking all about future planning. I am super pumped about this. I'm so passionate about it before we get started, though, first Melinda, will you please share about you your educational experience and your role at the IEP table?

Melinda:

Yes. Hello, I'm Linda AAS. I'm a special educator of eight years. I mainly work with students on the autism spectrum. I am a new author of the book, empowering inclusion, the tool teachers need to help all students succeed. So I'm really excited about that. And, um, I've had a lot of experience writing IEPs, the good, the bad and the ugly, you know? Um, so I'm excited to talk about the future planning section.

Stephanie:

Yes. Well, let's get started because again, I'm very passionate about this, about getting students involved in their IEP process. Even as young as pre-K, you can definitely make it happen. So let's just dive right in. So what is future planning and why is it so important to keep in mind when we're writing IEPs?

Melinda:

Yeah. Future planning is just all about kind of like asking the whole team what they want and what the goals are of the child that you're showcasing. And like you said, I love getting the students involved really, no matter what age I love when they're young too. And just be like, you know, what do, where do you see yourself next year? What goal do you have just to hear what they have to say? Um, last year I worked kindergarten through third, so it was fun to ask the second and third grader is like where they are. Um, my biggest pet peeve, I think with future planning is like a lot of people don't ask the student or involved the student at all. And I've seen that unfortunately a couple times that I would like to,

Stephanie:

I will, I will throw myself under the bus. When I first started, started teaching special ed. I did not involve students in the process at all, be a on transition. I, my first year I taught seventh grade math and we had to do transition plans and work on that. And I did that, but when I taught, you know, younger grades, I, I, I will say when I didn't know to do it, but now that I discovered it and it just it's so important. Go ahead.

Melinda:

Yeah. I was gonna say they don't really like at school, we were talking about this before. Like they don't really tell you to like, include this student. Usually they're like, we'll send this questionnaire home to parents and then that's it. And then you kind of briefly talk about it at the meeting. And, uh, that's how I was taught when I first joined too.

Stephanie:

Yeah. It's even if, if they even give you a questionnaire, most times you just, you have to make your own, I mean, that's what I had to do that was there was training. I had a mentor teacher and she was fantastic, but, oh man, well beyond that, how do we get families then involved and the student involved in future planning?

Melinda:

Gosh, well, I have to say first you gotta start with building relationships. That's like, I feel like key to anything. So make sure, you know, you're um, whether, what app you're on, you know, when you're communicating home, just make sure you have a good relationship with those parents and students first. But, um, I really like to send like, like we talked about, but fun questionnaires, you know, the generic, um, normal questions, but I like, you know, like just like fun ones, like where do you see your kid when he graduates high school, even though he could only be in third grade, you know, just like kind of bigger questions. Um, and then kind of break it down with reading or math, um, socializing. I feel like sometimes people forget about like emotional, excuse me, development or things like that. You can ask them that too. Um, but yeah, it's really that relationship piece. And then I feel like, you know, they might tell you more and get some good information for that. You know, future planning section.

Stephanie:

I think it's important for teachers and just all professionals and parents that work on IEP teams that the IDE says IEPs are built for further education employment in independent living all IEPs, not just the transit section of an IEP, the entire IEP. So while child might be in first grade, you can still ask those important questions. What do you, where, what do you wanna be when you grow up or what do you see your child doing? Or what functional skills would you love to see your child master this year and talk about those long term goals, but then build your current IEP goals to work on those baby steps, to get to that larger, bigger goal. So just keep that in the back of your mind when you're writing IEPs, no matter what age you're working with, all IEPs are developed to help students with that further education employment, independent living. That will not be the last time you hear me say that ever either. So, oh,

Melinda:

And then such good advice because man, I do have to say a high school teachers. That's their biggest like complaint is like they throw it all in when they're in like 10th, 11th, 12th grade, like all of a sudden they're talking about this now instead of yeah. When like middle school or intermediate school,

Stephanie:

When I, and I became so passionate about this because I started speaking with other teachers about just transition and I'm like, I have worked with so many elementary students who go into transition age and they have no idea that they even have an IEP. Like there has to be something we can do to help this. And that's, I mean, I developed all of the IEP advocacy, um, student self advocacy, IEP adapted books. I'll link them below to help students with that in a elementary. Like I it's so important because the more we give them when they're younger, the easier it is for us to do transition when they are of transition age. Yes. The more involved they can be when they're of transition age. And then when they're in the state of Florida, they just change transition age to 12. So at that age they might not, not even be thinking about college yet, but we can prep them then, you know, what do you wanna be when you grow up? What, what kind of skills do you think maybe they want to be a basketball player. A lot of kids wanna be a professional athlete. What kind of skills do you think you need to be able to do that? You know, all of those things and walk them through it. So when they get to transition age, they can kind of help you figure it out with them. So, right.

Stephanie:

Well, how does future planning align with a parent's vision statement? I know we kind of talked about this a little bit, but how does this align with like the parent input for an IEP?

Melinda:

Well, I, I have to say, like, I feel like parent input is so important, you know, I think some teachers don't, I don't know. I I've been to a couple meetings too, where I feel like parents don't get much to say, so I do love the future planning, cuz I feel like this is their moment to kind of, you know, showcase what they know and what they want out of their student. Um, and again aligns with the future. So I just, I love this part because it just gets them to talk more like this is where we, I think we talk the most in my IEP is the future planning cuz we do talk about next year and like, what'll it look like and what is he accomplished this year? I like to put in my future planning to the statement that was, um, referred to on the old IEP, like, oh, well last year, you know, in 2021 you wanted, you know, your son to do this and now this year look at where we're at. Like he did that already. So now where are we going from here? So it's kinda neat to get

Stephanie:

Love that so much because that really shows parents like this is the growth we've had, even if it's just a baby step.

Melinda:

Exactly. Like it's

Stephanie:

So growth and I think, and I'm, I agree with you. I don't think a lot of teachers and again, myself included when I first started teaching, I don't think that we think to ask those questions to parents.

Melinda:

Right,

Stephanie:

Right. Like what do you, what do you want for your child when they grow up? Like when they leave high school, what do, what are your plans? What do you think about, how do you feel about that?

Melinda:

I know. And when, and you do it, does it leads to good conversation? It really does. I feel like that that like section always, usually helps bridge too. And it starts off on the right foot future. Planning's like the second one. So

Stephanie:

Yes. Well I am here for this. Well as a special education teacher who writes the future planning section of IEPs, what does this process look for? You look like for you as a child's teacher,

Melinda:

You mean just, just filling out the section. Yeah. Like

Stephanie:

How do you do you, when you have an IEP, so say I'm your student, Stephanie is coming up, her IEP is due in 30 days. Like what, where do you start with writing the future planning section? Do you reach out to the parents prior? Like all those little things? Yeah.

Melinda:

Yeah. I guess at the beginning of the year, I love to send out like a big gen, like not generic, but the fun questionnaire. So I have that in the back of my, you know, toolbox as well. So I'm already like developed a relationship and I talk to parents being a special educator too. I'm sure. You know, like I send home progress notes all the time. Like we communicate daily about these kids, you know? Um, so when it comes to that future planning section, I love to meet with my paras too. Like I kind of start there and I say, you know, what do you think about this? Like where do you see the student going? So I get their input. I feel like that's important too. A lot of people, uh, don't use, I I'm obsessed with my team. I love them. So I go to them, I go to my therapist, like we work so well together.

Melinda:

So we get that. But, and then for the parents, um, kind of ask them the same questions. Like this is what the team's singing, what are you thinking? And kind of bounce ideas off of them and then go to the student too, if they're, you know, of, of age and you feel like it's appropriate, then you know, where do you see them? Like ask them how they feel. So then you kinda have the whole gamut. Um, yeah, if you're close district rep or you're a special, you know, educator director, like ask them, you know? So it's kind of, like you said, just it's the parent, but it's like everybody. Yes. Working together. So

Stephanie:

How does does this, what does this conversation look like at the IEP meeting? I know we've talked about it a little bit. Um, but what does that kind of look like for you and your teams at IEP meetings?

Melinda:

Yeah. Luckily, so if you're new to the education world, like, or the special education world, um, I, I feel like the draft is so important and the, the, before the IEP scenes are so important. So it really looks like a lot of conversations beforehand. When we get to that meeting, we're all pretty much on the same page, cuz we've all talked about it before. So, um, but I just love when we do all meet and then it can lead to other things like, oh my gosh, did you see last week? He totally mastered this. And um, that's probably my favorite part about IEP meetings is when you, I know you're on the time budget or whatever, but when you get those side conversations and you know, the parents are genuinely happy and everyone's all on the same page. It's a beautiful thing. When I first started, they said IEPs were really scary and that like parents are never happy and they always bring advocates. And when I first started, I got a really like kind of bad image of what IEPs are. And um, since I've been doing it, I feel like been opposite. So if you're out there and you're like, IEPs are scary, they're really not. And like Stephanie said, like, you can have fun with it. And um, you know, really showcase your kid's strengths.

Stephanie:

Absolutely. Well when it comes to future planning. So future planning is, like I said, further education, employment, and independent living. So education, we talk about education as the school, right. As the public school. So we have employment and independent living. I'm curious for you, at what point do you involve the community at all? Do you provide community resources at any point? Um, again, as a few, as like a first couple year teacher, I did not do this. I was like, yeah, no, no, but

Melinda:

Any, yeah. When they're younger, um, you know, when that usually comes up as like later in the IEP, I feel like I'll bring in the resources, but usually with future planning, I haven't, it's not, unless they're like when I taught middle school, we did, like you said, like kind of talked about what it would look like after high school and like where you see like the employment part. But, um, usually it's that, you know, the activities, the extracurricular, where we talk about the community resources, have you, in your experience, do you usually talk about it during future planning?

Stephanie:

Um, when I taught elementary, we never talked about other community resources as an IEP team at a whole. I know when we did talk about the extracurriculars, we would talk about like summer camps that are up or different parent groups or things like that. Um, and then when I taught high school, I actually worked with students who didn't qualify for special ed, but they still needed support. So I didn't have to write IEPs for them. Um, okay. So I've never gotten the opportunity to really work closely with community members and bring them in for meetings and do all of that stuff that I see happening, which is fantastic, but I have not.

Melinda:

Oh, okay. Okay. Yeah, it is. It's neat to, to do, but um, yeah.

Stephanie:

Well, there are a lot of things when it comes to extracurriculars, like I said, you can do their summer, summer camps that come up or, um, I mean, there's so many different extracurriculars you can have outside services for therapies or, yeah, I know like some movie theaters have like a sensory day where they like keep the lights on and all of the kids with disabilities come to the meeting and their PA or the, to the movie and watch the movie. And it's just, I've seen pictures of like my kids that I have taught go to those and parents share pictures and like that is the most amazing thing. So those things do happen within the community. And I think that, and I wish that when I was in the traditional classroom setting, that I had done more of that and been shared more of those involvements within the community with the families that I worked with, but they are out there.

Melinda:

Yeah, they are, you have to kind of dig. But, um, and I feel like parents are really appreciative. Like we send all the time and in my school has so many resources and I'm actually a coordinator of a, an adaptive ice skating program. Oh, wow. So I feel

Stephanie:

Now

Melinda:

I feel like I always kind of use my little, uh, ice skating usually during my IEPs and try to get all my, to attend. Um, I would love that there is a lot, you just kind of sometimes have to dig. I wish there was like a hub of, you know, what you have in your community somewhere.

Stephanie:

Yeah. Well you, I mean, as teachers, I know, we're like, okay, we have so many things on our plate. Do not put this on my plate to come up and find all the resources, but I'm sure if you reach out to, to other special ed in your district, y'all can come up together with just a list and have like a printed list that you can hand out to families. It would be. So as simple as that, that would be a great idea. Well, what is your best piece of advice for future planning as an IEP team, um, for students of age, for transition or you know, of not age for transition yet?

Melinda:

Yeah. I feel like just, um, make sure to get everybody involved. There's like nothing worse than going to an IEP meeting and saying the team feels, and then you realize, you know, for people you never talk to at all. So again, just kind of make sure everybody's involved <laugh> yeah.

Stephanie:

That

Melinda:

Just you and the parent,

Stephanie:

I think that is fantastic advice. Everyone is involved. Everyone is an equal team member, especially the parents, you know, on, in the Ida law. Parents are first, uh, as team members listed and making sure gen ed teachers are involved and they know that they are very much needed at the IEP table. They are the curriculum experts for grade level content standards. And we can't write IEPs without them. So just making sure that the whole team knows why they're there, that they're so important that their input is needed. I think that's great advice. Just making sure that you're writing IEPs as a team and getting everyone's input and not just doing it alone because you shouldn't be doing it alone.

Melinda:

Yes, no. Yeah.

Stephanie:

I love that.

Melinda:

Especially if you're gonna put the team, you know, I've seen that so many times the team, the team, and it's like, just make sure you have, and sometimes I've seen it, the team and then in parentheses, they list everyone, which is cool. I've

Stephanie:

Seen, oh, I like that.

Melinda:

Let me see it. Like how big your team really is, you know, PT speech. Like you see everyone. So that's me too.

Stephanie:

I love that idea. I've never seen that, but I love that. Yeah. And you could break that down into the profile section of the IEP, into Adam's input. It, all, it all connects. Are you figuring it out? All of the sections of an IEP connect, who new <laugh>. Yeah. Well, thank you so much, Melinda, for being here today and sharing all about future planning. I could talk about collaborating with, with IEP teams and student led IEPs and getting students involved in the IEP process at any age for days and hours am truly so passionate about this. So thank you so much for your here and sharing your expertise on this topic. Where can we find you, whether it be social media website, um, email or any of those things and like any other training I'll share Melinda's things below this video.

Melinda:

Perfect. Yeah, I'm on, um, Facebook and Instagram more Instagram. I'm not totally up to date with the reels and all that cool stuff. Um, find me, um, at empowering toolbox.

Stephanie:

Awesome. So I will link her below and then she does have a link tree, which has links to her book that she mentioned at the beginning. So make sure you check that out. Um, I will be checking that out after this training. I'm very excited to learn more from her and read more about her experience. So thank you again so much for being here and sharing about future planning. I have enjoyed this chat. I hope those of you that are listening have learned something that you can take and implement right away or thought of a different way to do something. I hope that you learned at least one piece of advice. Um, and I'm hopeful that you have. So thank y'all so much for being here. Thank you again, Melinda. And we'll see y'all in the next chat.

Melinda:

Thank you.