

Speaker 1:

Hey everyone. My name is Stephanie. I am the founder and your host here for all of these guest speaker chats here at the intentional IEP. I'm here with one of my very good friends Meredith today, and we are gonna be talking all about assigning roles at the IEP table, but before we get started, Meredith, will you please share about your experience in education, um, what you're currently doing and your role at the IEP table?

Speaker 2:

Sure. So my name is Meredith Mitchell. I have been in education for about 20 years now. So a little bit of a long journey and I, every day, I'm still excited by it. I still love it. I am a special education teacher. I have taught in several different types of classrooms. And so, um, I love it. I I'm still enjoying it day by day. I also do special education consulting. I work with teachers and provide professional development and kind of speak all over the Southeast. And so that's also fun for me to get, to be a part of, um, going out there and sharing and, and learning from other teachers and teaching them how to write IEPs and doing a better job. So I'm so excited to be here today to be on your, uh, team, to talk to everyone out, how to, um, assign roles at the IEP table.

Speaker 1:

I'm gonna to Meredith horn real quick because she didn't do it herself. She was also teacher of the year in the state of Alabama. Right?

Speaker 2:

I was for my district. Yes. So district. Okay, so, right. So there's like six districts in the state of Alabama, but yes, so I was for my district and I was in the top eight for elementary special education teachers, top eight and estate.

Speaker 1:

You need to start with that. Like that is if like not anyone can say that. So I think that's amazing. Well, I'm so excited that you're here, so let's just dive right in. But let's start at the very beginning. So who is on the IEP team and who sits at the IEP table?

Speaker 2:

Well, if you are a special education teacher, then you know, most of the team, right? So it's definitely gonna start with your parents. You definitely have them to be a part of your team. You're gonna have the general education teacher, the special education teacher, anybody that provides a related service to that child, you would also have your Lea, which is your local education agency. A lot of times that role's filled by the, the principal, the vice principal counselor, sometimes even like an instructional coach or your special education coordinator can be, um, a part of the IEP team. Also the student, right? When they get old enough or the parent wants to include them, always include them in the IEP so that they feel like they have a role and a say, um,

on what they want their goals to be and how maybe they can be motivated to meet those goals.

Speaker 2:

They're a part of, of the IEP team to transition services can be a part of the IEP team as well. Um, and then of course, anybody, the parent really wants to bring to the IEP meeting. We sometimes we forget about that, but parents are, are always welcome to bring sometimes even an advocate or just a coach, a relative somebody, um, to help them better understand the IEP process. So they're welcome to do as well. And that usually makes up your, your IEP team. Um, when you get ready to send out those invites, you wanna make sure you invite all of those people.

Speaker 1:

Well, what is, there's a lot of people at the IEP table. So what do, what does each of these peoples do? What peoples do? What is their role at the IEP table? What do they all do?

Speaker 2:

Well, of course the parent is the expert on the child, right? You wanna make sure that they feel like they're welcome and that they are an equal team member. So of course you wanna send out that draft copy to them. Once you get it started, send it to them so they can read over it so they can feel like they be they're prepared to come 'em to the meeting and then ask them to bring anything that they would like to share at the meeting as well. So you wanna offer that invitation out there in front. So that way they feel like when they come in, they have something to share, right? We don't want them to feel like they, they don't even have an input statement. They don't even have any concerns cuz clearly they have concerns. Their child is in special education. So we want them to feel like that they can bring those concerns and that we're gonna be listening to them and using their input to guide us in the IEP.

Speaker 2:

So that's a very important role for a parent to feel that way. Um, also the general education teacher has a, has a strong role on the IEP team. And a lot of times they're quiet and they don't say a lot. And sometimes the special education teacher, I can be guilty of that. Sometimes I just kind of take over and lead the meeting, cuz I'm so used to doing these meetings, but you wanna make sure that that special education teacher knows she has a role, know that she's important to please bring any, you know, work samples, report cards, any data, any type of observation they have of that child in the classroom, or even just not even academics, but behavior know or just how they interact socially with one another. You want them to bring those statements. And if you don't tell them that you need this information ahead of time, they're not gonna bring it.

Speaker 2:

And then when you ask them about it in the meeting, then they're not prepared. And then that kind of can take your meeting to a halt. And the everybody's just staring at

them. Nobody wants to feel that way. And that's a why I feel like when you give them a sign, 'em a role tell 'em I need you to bring these things. Then that kind of helps it go better and smoother because a lot of times general education teachers just don't know what to do. I think that's the number one question I get from a teacher when it's time to come, if you don't prepare them, is what do I need to bring? What do I need to say? Um, and so go ahead and tell 'em and prep them and say, these are the things I need. And this is some things I'd like for you to talk about at the meeting.

Speaker 2:

So those that's a big role. And then usually the special education teacher or the case manager is gonna be the leader of the meeting most of the time. Um, at least in my experience now, sometimes your LEAs will be a part of that too. And that's why I think it's important when you do those roles, you need to ahead and talk about who is going to introduce everybody who is going to, is it the special education teacher or is it gonna be your Lea who is going to take the minutes who is going to, um, you know, talk to the parents. And so a lot of times the Lea and the special education teacher can do both of those roles. So it's important to talk about that before the meeting starts. So that way we're runs smoothly, but your, um, your Lea is someone who definitely can make the decisions, um, or help guide that conversation.

Speaker 2:

When the parent asks for something like a paraprofessional, can we get a paraprofessional one-on-one well, that's not the special education teacher's decision. That would be your Lea decision or your district's decision, those kind of things. So that's why they're there to help make those decisions and, and talk about what options are out there. Um, or if you're talking about like the least restriction environment, which classroom setting would be best for a child, that would be a question for your Lea to help bring in those types of, of decisions and discuss at, at, at the IEP meeting. That's why they're there. That's why it's usually a principal, um, a district person, um, a counselor sometimes can make those decisions and if they can't make those decisions, then you just stop and you say, we need to look into this a little bit further. We need to talk to some other people in our county and our district to see if these options are available.

Speaker 2:

Um, and then you just reschedule the meeting, but that's why they're there. And that's what makes it important. But the special education teacher definitely is the one that writes the IEP. Um, she gets information or he gets information from everybody on the team to start that draft. And then as a team, you're gonna write it together. So she's the one that's typing it up, putting in information, gathering on the data and to put in and, and reading over everything. I know in the IEP meetings that I have, the special education teacher, we read it word for word. Um, we wanna make sure that parents sees it, understands it. We can stop. We can add things in as we go. Um, so it's very important, um, to be ready for that, if you're a special education teacher, you're gonna read and present that whole IEP to, um, to the team.

Speaker 2:

So those are the main people in your meeting. When you look at the related services, and sometimes we forget to invite these people. That's really common and it really hurts their feelings sometimes, but we are all human. It happens, but you wanna make sure you invite your speech therapists. And most of the time they know like give them a heads up, you're coming, make sure you had your data on your goals, the occupational therapists, physical therapists, times you need your behavior specialist to come to the meeting. And, and most of the time they just know they're gonna bring their data and give them time to share, um, that information transition services as well, sometimes transportation, you invite them as well. If they ride the special education bus, um, or any type of services that transportation can provide to that family, you would want to make sure you at least invite them to the meeting.

Speaker 2:

Now, if they can't come, I know in a lot of IEPs at the bottom section, it'll say like people who weren't in attendance, but can that gave information. You wanna make sure you list them there, um, to put them in there. And then of course the student, you know, if they're on the IEP team, their role is very important. If they're ready to come. Um, I've had students youngest third grade come to their IEP meetings. Um, especially children who need a lot of emotional support, social skill support. If you bring them in and ask them, what are some things you wanna work on? And what are some things that are gonna motivate you? It's really important to have them at the IEP meeting, um, high school level students. I know I've seen several where they present their IEP to the whole team, um, which is phenomenal. They create a PowerPoint presentation on their goals. They talk about how they and met their goals. Um, it was just amazing. And so there's so many different options for students to be a part of their IEP because let's face it, it's theirs. And I feel like you should be honest with your child. If they have an IEP and tell 'em what it is, why they have it and let them meet everybody, that's there to support them so they can understand, um, that they're just as much a part of this journey as we all are.

Speaker 1:

I love that I have so many things to add to that. So, um, I love that you send the draft IEP that makes my heart so happy. That is a hill that I will die on. Um, I love that you talked about talking with the gen ed teacher and letting them know what bring beforehand. I think that's so important. I actually have a free, um, training that was on Instagram, but it's all it's on YouTube. Now I'll link below this training about just what gen ed teachers should bring to the IEP meeting. I think that's so important. So I'll link that below here. So y'all have that. And then you talked about bringing the child to the IEP meeting. So if you're, if this is your first time for a summer PD series last summer, we had three or four expert, um, teachers talking about how they involved the student in the IEP process in the IEP meeting.

Speaker 1:

Um, we had elementary, middle school and high school. So we had all three. So if you're here this year for the summer PD, you have access to last year, summer PD

series as well. So make sure you go back and watch those I'll link them. So you know which ones they are, but there's great information there. I'll also link. I have a student led IEP toolkit that you can, um, purchase to use. And then I, if you are in elementary school, I actually created a whole bundle of adapted books and readers that you can use to introduce what an IEP is. What is a disability? How am I, how do I be a part of my meeting? It's all of these IEP advocacy related books for students, and then there's activities in each of their, and there's actually a PowerPoint presentation that you can use to have them be a part of the meeting because I am very passionate as well about involving students as early as possible in their IEP meeting.

Speaker 1:

I've been to too many meetings as a middle school teacher or a high school teacher sat on that, um, IEP team where the child is coming. And they're like, I didn't even know that I had an IEP before I got here and that breaks my heart. So I love that. You, you talked about that, that just all of that makes my heart. So how well, so you did talk a little bit about talking about, um, talking to the gen ed teacher beforehand, but how do you prep beforehand to get team members ready for the IEP meeting, if at all?

Speaker 2:

So we don't typically have like say you hear these things about having a pre-meeting before the IEP with the team, without the parent. So that's not what we're talking about. Mainly it's just, I'll, I'll send a out an email to make sure, Hey, you know, to remind everyone that we do have the IEP meeting and then I have, um, and my IEP essential kit that I have is just a list of the roles and responsibilities. And so what I do, and I'll be glad to share that with Stephanie. So y'all can have that is, um, it just lists out the roles and the responsibilities for each person that's gonna attend the meeting and what like for them to do. And I just assign their name next to it. So that way there isn't any questions about, you know, who is gonna take the notes, who is gonna introduce everybody, who's gonna present the data.

Speaker 2:

Um, and when they're gonna present the data, what, you know what, and then I wanna tell 'em what data to bring. Um, cuz sometimes they're like data, what data well be specific, you know, whatever types of data you use, um, for your reading series to measure their growth or if your, their goals are in math, you wanna make sure you bring your, um, those diagnostics that you're using. We're not talking about like the psychometrist and all of that testing that they do to get into special education. But we're were talking about just the informal and informal, you know, data that you take throughout the school year. You wanna bring that to show, um, the growth that they have in the general education classroom. And of course the special education teacher can bring her own that she's using, um, or he, um, to the meeting as well.

Speaker 2:

Um, you wanna make sure that somebody's there at the end, who's gonna summarize everything at the IEP meeting and then who's gonna read over the notes. So that way it's important that everybody knows exactly what they're gonna do when they come in. And you know, I always tell 'em, I'm like, bring your laptop, bring your, you know, paper, bring a pen. And then I always have an IEP, um, crate that I bring to every meeting because where I'm at, we have a conference room we don't meet and, and that's where we always go. So I wanna make sure I have all of that information in there and ready to go. Um, because teachers will ask, well, are you gonna gimme the paper to take notes on, am I gonna taking it on my computer? All of those things, you just wanna prep everyone to say, I have the, the paper that you're gonna use.

Speaker 2:

I have blue, blue ink, blue pens, um, because you gotta have blue, blue pens are my color. So you have those ready, have a stapler, have, have envelopes, have a folder that you're gonna give all that information to the parent. Um, and I always tell the parents that too, in the, in the email that I send them before the meeting or either I'll print out a piece of paper when I send home the notice, um, of proposal with them, a, a nice letter, because sometimes those invitations to the meetings, they're very formal and they're very scary, almost like, like it's from a lawyer or something, and the parents don't understand how to what it means. And so I just send a nice little cover letter to explain it very friendly. Um, what's gonna happen, what's going on. So that way they feel like it's more of an invitation to come and talk, you know, and not just, um, a very formal types. It is a very formal meeting, but we want it to be as informal as we can. So that way we make sure that everyone is comfort. So if you just kind of throw that out there and let everybody understand, like, this is what I need you to do, then it makes it easier for everyone at the IEP, um, table when the meetings are going and it is happening. So that way you can stay with your agenda.

Speaker 1:

I love that. Well, I know we're supposed to be talking about assign roles at the IEP table, but I would love for you to ex explain a little bit more about how you run your IEP meetings when it comes to all of the different moving pieces sitting at the table.

Speaker 2:

Sure. So, like I said, I would Def I start with my grade level, my grade level norms and the meeting norms and the, um, the agenda, your ground rules are very important to go over at the very beginning of the meeting. And I usually let my Lea, I sign that to them is like, this is your responsibility. Um, when you come in and so they know that they're gonna start it, they're gonna read the norms. They're gonna read over the agenda and they're gonna read the ground rules to everyone at the team. Um, and then we start our introductions. I find that it's really helpful if you have name tags, I know not to wear, but if you just have place cards, like, you know, like let's think Southern, you know, table, everybody has a name at their, with their little place because when you have this many people on your team and some parents don't remember your name, they might know the special education teacher's name.

Speaker 2:

And if they're trying to take notes or if they brought somebody with them and they don't know you, it's great. Just to have like a little name card sitting in front of where you're gonna sit, um, and have like assigned seats. You don't have to, but when everybody comes in, then you can just pass out. The name cards, have one for the parent ready, because how awkward sometimes is it when, when mom brings in somebody else maybe, and you don't know who that person is. And then you're like, can you tell me who you are again, I forgot your name. And so then you don't have to write it on the little name card sitting in front of them. That's just a helpful, you know, tip to make it friendly. And, and everybody can kind of know everyone's name. So if they're taking notes, they can remember who everyone is.

Speaker 2:

So that's kind of important if you haven't done that before, it's definitely helpful. Um, so that works to help kind of keep those roles and where we're going. Who's gonna talk when and where, um, cuz there are a lot of moving parts. So you wanna make sure you go over when you start talking about the profile page, students strengths, pause and make sure that once you've said what you think the students strengths are, ask the general education teacher to give her input and then ask the parents to give their input. And if they agree, I typically do that as we move through the AP meeting with all the different roles I'll I'll ask, does everyone agree with that? And so make sure everyone does agree if they don't agree, then stop and discuss it. Just have an open communication to figure out, you know, what else, what could we change?

Speaker 2:

Do we need to, you don't like this statement, so let's maybe use this instead. So if you keep asking, does everyone agree with this? As you move along, when you get to the end, then you're not gonna have this huge blow up of, well, I don't agree with that. And I don't like that. And I didn't like that goal and those kind of things. So if you ask along the way it can help as you build that relationship, that trust with your team. I think that's really important as, as you go through IEP meetings. So I definitely do that as we, as my IEP meeting is going through, um, we still select the goals. I typically will have two or three to, to present to the team. I don't like to predetermine, but we basically, you understand, if the child didn't meet their goal, then you know, you need to work on that.

Speaker 2:

If they did meet their goal. And then, you know, just depending on it's a reading goal, do you wanna up the reading level, do you wanna, you know, give them, ask them to do it in a shorter amount of time, you know, look at those kind of, of things and have some options out there for the parent. And a lot of times the parent can even come back and ask, well, you know what, they're really weak. I feel like they're not doing well in writing right now. Can we add a writing goal? Well, of course, you know, so be ready for that and have options ready for them to select, um, those types of goals. A lot of times I'll have it pulled up already in my computer. Um, we pull 'em from the

standards and the course of study, so that way you're not fumbling through it and trying to find it and, and, and then there's that awkward time.

Speaker 2:

So I feel like the more you prep and the more you have, like a little list of things that, you know, you're gonna need for your meeting, it can be helpful with those, um, with those roles. So that's typically what I do to make sure that our IEP meetings run smoothly after it's over, you know, again, we all talk about, you know, if we all agree with that, and then I always, you know, print 'em out, we read over it, we sign it. And then I always have folders envelopes, those kind of things, um, for parents to put the IEP in, because most than likely, most of the time I will give it to them at the meeting. Um, every, and then, then we'll send home the notice of, um, intent, like at the end of the meeting, sometimes they'll leave with it. Sometimes I'll send it in an email after it, once we've read over everything. It's okay. Um, to do that. But some parents would like to just sit and wait, um, until it's all done so they can walk out. So you just kind of have to know your parent, know your team, know what, you know, what gonna be, what they're gonna expect. So that way, if you're in agreement, yes, you can't, you know, send it to them later, um, to give yourself some time to make sure you've read over everything and gotten it through. So it just kind of depends on your team.

Speaker 1:

So you, you mentioned a notice of intent and I think I know what that is, but I just want, so you, you send that after the IEP meeting, is that kind of like a prior written notice? Is that what the notice of intent is?

Speaker 2:

Yeah, so it's different in different areas. It's it's we call it that notice of intent or notice of, um, proposal or refusal to take action. So it's just a, a very wordy document just to talk about what the team decided, um, what their decision was, what helped them make that decision. And then if you, at anything you thought about adding, let's say, we thought about, you know, adding more time, um, out of the classroom, but then we decided not to, because it was gonna take away from whatever and you just put that statement in at the bottom and then you send it, you don't have to send it. Um, that date can go home later, but I typically do try to send home everything at one at that time at that IEP, but we all know, you know, we all human things happen and internet things happen and you're not able to print things out and the, you know, all of that kind of stuff. So it does. So you do have grace period, so you can send, um, you don't, you know, the IEP home later too, if you need to just based on what the team, you know, has decided.

Speaker 1:

Awesome. Thank you for explaining that. I thought that that's what you meant. It's the prior written notice. So for those of you, you listening notice of intent, notice of proposal or refusal is the same thing as a prior written notice. Um, and you do have

a, they don't, the law doesn't give like a specific, it says within appropriate meaning of time or something, right. Or like don't give you like

Speaker 2:

Weeks is kind of what we usually go with, um, 10 days. Um, but yeah, that's

Speaker 1:

Usually what, what it's been, but it's the law doesn't say that, but school districts and states usually give specific timelines for that. So if you're not sure about your prior written notice or notice of intent, um, for your, your school specific school and what the rules and regulations are, ask admin, ask somebody at district, um, cuz they will be able to tell you for sure. Well, what is your best piece advice for when it comes to assigning roles at the IEP table?

Speaker 2:

I think you wanna look at everyone's strengths. So you wanna look at your team, you wanna see what their strengths are. Um, sometimes if you have a general education teacher, who's very quiet. She's not outspoken. Um, she might be even a little nervous or overwhelmed, especially if this is her first or second IEP meeting. Um, you wanna look at that and you just wanna say, okay, well if you tell her, okay, well I'm so glad you're coming. Please present this data. And then you, you know, give her a little something so that she can get, be ready and prepared. Um, so that way she, you wouldn't wanna choose her to like I, to everyone because that might, you know, make her nervous. So you wanna look at the strengths, obviously most of the time, your Lea is gonna be someone who deals with parents and, and staff and faculty a lot.

Speaker 2:

So that's who you're gonna wanna start with someone who is comfortable with these meetings to introduce everybody. You wanna pick people. Um, like I said, that, you know, what is gonna be in their wheel ill house to do so that's typically what I like to do. Um, get to know your team, get to know who's coming. So that way, you know, if this person has really messy handwriting, then they probably don't need to take your minutes by hand. They might need to, you know, take it, um, type it on the computer for you. Um, that's just important, you know, little things that you can think of ahead of time. And then you always, when you, when you look at those things, I always look at the end and you wanna thank everybody for coming. You wanna make sure that everyone felt like their opinion was valued and you wanna, a lot of times I'll send follow up emails, even a handwritten thank you card for coming to my meeting because you know, they're taking time out of their day to be a part of the team and to give everything back to those parents child, and you want them to make sure that they feel appreciated as well, especially, you know, the parent, because that's the most important part of your team.

Speaker 2:

So you wanna make sure when you sign those rules and even the parent, you know, thank 'em for their input, thank 'em for the data that they brought. Thank 'em for everything that, you know, they contributed to the, to the IEP and always ask 'em, you know, at the end, if they have any questions or concerns. So, you know, just look at everybody's strengths, um, it's really important. And then you it'll help you, um, kind of assign the roles to them and if they liked it and they did a great job, then you can, you know, make a note of that that went well and, and they'd be willing to do it again for your next meeting.

Speaker 1:

I love that. I think that's great advice and I'm taking notes as she's talking actually is why I keep looking away and why my computer shook cuz I was erasing something. Um, so I am learning with y'all at the same time, I'm taking notes for myself as well. Uh, well thank you so much Meredith for being here and sharing your expert advice and experience and just knowledge with all of us. Thank y'all for being here so much. Um, but before we go, Meredith, will you share where we can find you there that's a blog, a website, social media. Um, and then as with any of these videos, y'all you can find links to Meredith below this video to just click and go find her.

Speaker 2:

Sure. So yes, I'm definitely have a website it's Meredith Mitchells methods.com. And so I'm there. I do have a blog on, on my website that has like information that I put out there, little mini trainings and things like that. Cause I am very passionate about, you know, helping teachers understand the IEP process and you wanna make sure your IEPs are always manageable, meaningful, measurable. Those are very important skills that you want in your IEP. So that all that information is there on my website. I am also on Instagram, um, with Meredith Mitchell's methods, Facebook, all those fun places you can find me. And, um, I would love to have you follow me and just give any input insight that anybody else can bring to, to me and to the IEP table. Cuz it's so important, um, that we have a collaborative team.

Speaker 1:

Yes, I love it. So again, you can find links to Meredith's website, her blog, um, all of her social media below this video, you can click and go follow her. Please go do that. Thank you again, Meredith for being here today. Thank you all for being here during one of these sessions for the summer PD series and I'll see you guys again soon. Have a good one.

Speaker 2:

Hi.