Stephanie DeLussey:

Hey, everyone, Stephanie here. I am the founder and host of these guest speaker chats here at The Intentional IEP. I'm so excited to be here with Rebekah today because we're going to be talking about writing IEP goals for students that aren't on grade level. This is a question that I get asked often, and I'm so excited that Rebekah's going to share her expertise on this topic with all of you. So before we get started though, Rebekah, please introduce yourself. Tell us your teaching experience and your role at the IEP table.

Rebekah Poe:

Hi, my name is Rebekah Poe. I have a master's degree in collaborative education K-6. I have taught every grade except fifth grade out of that kindergarten through sixth grade level, and I'm currently teaching sixth grade right now. Before started teaching, I was a paraprofessional for about seven years. So, I've been in the special education field for about a decade, just teaching the last three.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Wow.

Rebekah Poe:

At the IEP table, I write the IEPs, I get input from the gen ed teachers, from the families, from the students, and put everything together to present a draft of an IEP at a meeting where the parents and the other parts of the IEP team, we'll go over it together, make any changes that they need, and then we sign off.

Stephanie DeLussey:

What state are you in?

Rebekah Poe:

I'm in Alabama.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Alabama. I always ask because it's so different state to state, what the role as a special ed teacher is.

Rebekah Poe:

Yes.

Stephanie DeLussey:

So, I'm always curious just to see, even though it changes district to district within states, but I'm always curious to ask. That's the only reason that I ask. So, let's get started. I'm super excited to talk about this today. It's something that I've had to do in the past, and it's something that a lot of teachers have to deal with but maybe aren't sure quite how to get started or what to do. But before we talk about aligning goals to standards, let's briefly chat about IEP goals. So, do you use a specific goal writing template?

Rebekah Poe:

I do. I have a goal template that I came up with that I use that just kind of helps me. All my goals are written the same way. So, this helps me keep everything on track and make sure I have all the components necessary. I start with the timeline of the goal. For my district, we go by calendar year. So if I write an IEP in February of a child's sixth grade year, it's going to run to February of their seventh grade year. So, I start with the timeline, and then list the conditions under which the student will participate while working on the goals.

Rebekah Poe:

After the timeline of the goal, we'll move into the conditions, which will be where they'll complete the goal in the resource room, in the gen ed classroom, how many problems they'll have, things like that, and then we get into the actual meat of the goal. You state exactly what you're expecting the student to be able to do. You want it to be objective and measurable. Then the accuracy, I don't like to give goals with a hundred percent because we're all human, we're all fallible. We're all going to make mistakes. So, I typically tend to go around 80, 85% accuracy.

Rebekah Poe:

Then the duration. Will that occur over nine weeks? Will it occur for the entire school year? What's the length of time that the student will be working toward that goal? At what point will it be considered mastered?

Stephanie DeLussey:

Gotcha. So, what is the first step then when writing IEP goals for students who are not on grade level?

Rebekah Poe:

I like to look at our curriculum standards, looking at what I know the student is already capable of doing and where the shortcomings are with those, where the struggle situations are. A lot of times a general education standard, you can break it down into very small pieces. You'll really want to look at, what is the smallest piece of this goal that we need to work on in order to bridge that gap and get them up to the grade level standard? It's still is tying into that standard, it's just a small. Bite-size manageable piece that the student won't be overwhelmed by but is still working toward that same standard that their non-disabled peers are working towards.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yeah, I love that. So, I'm going to give an example, just for people who might be a little confused.

Rebekah Poe:

Yeah.

Stephanie DeLussey:

So, let's say we have a student who is in kindergarten and we're working on one-to-one correspondence. So giving student the number two, and then being able to say, "That's one, two whales," right?

Rebekah Poe:

Exactly.

Stephanie DeLussey:

So, what skills lead up to that, that that student maybe has not mastered yet or that we need to work on, because maybe one-to-one correspondence and counting whales to two is a grade level standard for kindergarten, but maybe they're not there yet? Maybe we're still working on identifying numbers, maybe we're still working on counting out numbers. What skills are needed before you get to that grade level standard, counting whales, before you get to that grade level standard that you maybe need to work on first? Because in the end, you're still going to get to that grade level standard.

Rebekah Poe:

Exactly.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yeah. So, go ahead.

Rebekah Poe:

So in your example, sorry.

Stephanie DeLussey:

No, you're fine.

Rebekah Poe:

In your example for the whales, for some students, it could be will participate in classroom counting or participate in rope counting. When I taught at the high school in a self-contained class, a lot of our students, their goals were that they would participate in the education setting and participate in the activity, because there were a lot of significant disabilities and delays that made it much more difficult for them but we still wanted to give them access to the standards.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yeah. So, with that question, that's kind of what we're talking about for everyone listening is, look your grade level standards and then think about, what skills does the student need to be able to do this standard? Then, you're kind of working backwards. Yeah.

Rebekah Poe:

Yeah.

Stephanie DeLussey:

So, I guess this is the big loaded question. I guess, I jumped ahead, I'm sorry. So, I think that's probably the biggest question for everybody right now. Even with the example that I gave, how do you write IEP goals for students working below grade level, but their IEP goals, maybe our standards aligned, or they have to be connected to grade level content? How do we write these IEP goals?

Rebekah Poe:

All right. So for me right now, I'm a sixth grade special education teacher and my students, the majority of them are specific learning disability is their eligibility category, right? So for some of them, they are on

a second grade level, I guess to say, for their math. That's their functioning level. That's their independent level. We're working on multiplying with decimals in sixth grade, touching back on that at the beginning of the year, where I had students, they don't know their multiplication facts, they don't have those memorize.

Rebekah Poe:

So we use an accommodation to help them in the classroom while they're working on multiplying with decimals. But then when they come to me in the resource room, we're working on those multiplication facts that the lower level math, that still ties in with something that they'll need to know in order to multiply decimals, but it's more at the level of where they're functioning at the moment.

Rebekah Poe:

So, we're working on bridging those gaps in the resource room. When they're in the gen ed room, they're able to use as accommodations to kind of fill in that gap, but the goal is to eventually, they won't need that multiplication chart. They'll be able to just do it from memory or use a little, not a cheat, but just another way to work it. I'll tap on my finger because I have a student who, for counting by threes, we count the joints in his finger.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Oh, that's so far.

Rebekah Poe:

So, he'll do one, two, three. Four, five, six. Seven, eight, nine, and we're able to do that, rather than him needing the multiplication chart. Because on state assessments, my students, they're not able to use the multiplication charts, so I don't want them to get so caught up in being in needing that accommodation that they feel like they can't function without it. So, anything that we can do to alleviate that is so important.

Stephanie DeLussey:

I love that you brought up accommodations with writing IEP goals. In the summer PD series, we touched on this, and I'm really trying to nail it in that we write our present levels, which then align into our IEP goals, which then tell us what accommodations we need, and then give us the supports and services that the student needs based off of all of those things.

Rebekah Poe:

Exactly.

Stephanie DeLussey:

So, I love that you brought that up because there's a connection. The more that we hear it, listening to all of these sessions, I hope that everyone's like, "Yes, we can work on multiplication in the resource room and have this accommodation in the gen ed setting." That's how it all connects and it all works when you're implementing the IEP. So, I love that you brought that up.

Rebekah Poe:

Yes. Thank you.

Stephanie DeLussey:

What is something that maybe we should be aware of to not do when we're aligning below level IEP goals to grade level standards?

Rebekah Poe:

So when we're creating the IEP goals that are on grade level standards but our students are not, we want to make sure that we're keeping that goal as specific as possible. We don't want to make it too broad because we want to work on one targeted skill. So when I gave the example of multiplication, when we're doing multiplication with decimals and division with decimals, a lot of times a gen ed teacher will say, when I ask for input for the survey, they need to work on decimals. That's a very broad topic.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yeah.

Rebekah Poe:

What are we going to be doing with the decimals? So, I don't want to do something that's going to be more than one skill, because division is entirely separate from multiplication. Even though they go together, they're two separate skillsets.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yes.

Rebekah Poe:

So, I might pick working on math facts because that is something that they could use in multiplying decimals and dividing decimals and different things like that. So while it's a skill that works for both targeted areas, the whole goal is not to be able to solve equations involving decimals.

Stephanie DeLussey:

I love that.

Rebekah Poe:

We want to make sure that it's specific as it possibly can be because we don't want the student to be overwhelmed and we don't want them to get part of the goal, because then the whole goal is still not mastered.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Right.

Rebekah Poe:

So, as targeted and as narrow as the goal can be gives them the best chance of success.

Stephanie DeLussey:

I love that you brought that up. I think that's great advice, not only for working with the student in the classroom, but what if the student moves and you send that student off with a very broad goal? The next teacher's going to be like, "But what about decimals?"

Rebekah Poe:

Yes. What are we doing with decimals?

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yeah. I mean, even in addition, there's so much. Even in subtraction, there's so much. I love that advice. Be very specific and narrow with what specific skill you're working on. I love that.

Rebekah Poe:

When they're behind grade level, I think there's a strong tendency to want to work on everything.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yeah.

Rebekah Poe:

Because they need it. They need that support in all subjects and across all of the standards, but you can't let that temptation overwhelm the IEP.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yeah, that's such great advice. Well, so I feel like that's the best piece of advice ever, but I have one last question for you.

Rebekah Poe:

Okay.

Stephanie DeLussey:

What is your one best piece of advice for writing below grade level IEP goals to grade level standards?

Rebekah Poe:

Talk to your gen ed teachers. I know I just said that sometimes the gen ed teachers will come with a very broad topic, but they're the ones who are in the classroom and they're the ones that are teaching our students without disabilities, so they know what a student on grade level should look like.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yeah.

Rebekah Poe:

So, they're going to know what a student not on grade level needs to work on. So, go to your gen ed teachers, collaborate. I send out an IEP input survey, well in advance of the IEP, and I always include, what is one area that the student finds frustrating? What's an area where the student is behind on? What is one targeted skill that you feel would benefit the student?

Rebekah Poe:

Once I get all of that information, I'm able to go back and say, "All right. Well, this teacher thinks they need to work on figurative language. What part of figurative language can I pull that will bridge that gap from their current level of performance to the grade level?"

Stephanie DeLussey:

I love that. I love that. [inaudible 00:13:11].

Rebekah Poe:

It has to be collaboration, especially when you are doing resource and you're working with gen ed teachers and students with IEPs within the general education setting. It has to be a team effort.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yes. Yes.

Rebekah Poe:

Having the gen ed teachers involved in the creation of the IEP also gives them a little extra sense of responsibility in the implementation of it.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yeah, absolutely. I love that. So, you're kind of dissecting the standards, essentially, when you're writing those IEP goals. Yeah.

Rebekah Poe:

Exactly, yeah. Break them down as far as you can and pull out the really essential part of the standard, and that's what you're going to want to write the IEP goal on.

Stephanie DeLussey:

I love that so much. That's so helpful. Everything you shared is so helpful. You just broke it down into really simple steps that other teachers watching this can do and not feel overwhelmed with. So, thank you so much for sharing your expertise and knowledge on this. This is such a great topic. We could probably talk for hours on this topic.

Rebekah Poe:

Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

Stephanie DeLussey:

But thank you so much for being a guest speaker today.

Rebekah Poe:

Of course.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Please share where viewers can find you. As always, y'all, all the links to Rebekah's things are going to be below this video so that you can click and go find her in one click.

Rebekah Poe:

Okay. On Instagram and Facebook, I am Lessons and Lattes. On Teachers Pay Teachers, I am Lessons and Lattes with Mrs. Poe. If you search Lessons and Lattes, you'll probably find me.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yeah, awesome. Again, links are below here for all of Rebekah's things. So if you have more questions, you can certainly ask me, but you can also reach out to Rebekah for more questions on writing IEP goals for students that are not on grade level. It's a very hard thing to do, but once you have a system and you understand how to dissect the IEP goals, I feel like you have a system in place and it makes it so much easier.

Rebekah Poe:

Much simpler.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Yeah. Well, thank you again so much. Thank you, guys, for tuning in for this guest speaker chat. I hope that this session was really helpful to you. It's something that y'all have been asking me about, so it's very needed, and I hope that you guys enjoy it. Again, thank you so much, Rebekah, and we'll see you next time.

Rebekah Poe:

Thank you for having me.

Stephanie DeLussey:

Of course, bye.

Rebekah Poe:

Bye.