

Stephanie:

Hey everyone. My name is Stephanie and I am your host and founder here at the intentional IEP for all of these guest speaker chats for the summer PD series. I'm so excited to be here today with my friend, Steve, we're gonna be talking all about the evaluation request letter. You have no idea what that is. If you've never set one, but you're curious you're in the right place. But before we get started, Steve, will you please share a little bit about you, your teaching experience and your role at education, your role at education, your role at the IEP table too.

Steve:

There, there we go. All, all of that. That's good. Um, so, uh, currently I work for the epilepsy Alliance, Ohio, and I work with parents whose children either need a 504 plan or an IEP. Uh, and my teaching experience is I've been a teacher, a principal director of special education, uh, instructional supervisor, a superintendent. I worked as a highly skilled educator for the Kentucky department of education, helping schools raise their student achievement level. Uh, and, um, I've, I've been a presenter at multiple local state regional and, uh, at national conferences. And, um, actually, I'm, I'm also a proud member of the master IEP coach, um, network. And, uh, I get lots of great ideas from those folks as well.

Stephanie :

And that is how Steve and I met through the master IEP coach network. Um, and I'm very excited about this conversation today because I personally have never written an evaluation request letter that was always handled by like the diagnostician or the art facilitator. Art facilitator is the annual review. I always mess a lot. I don't remember what the D stands for, but it's a Texas thing. Um, so I'm very excited to talk with you about this today. So let's just dive in and get started. What is an evaluation request letter and when might an IEP, you need to see one,

Steve:

Uh, the, the parents that I work with, many of them have been trying for years and, and, and I've just come in lately working with them, uh, asking to be evaluated and they've been denied. And, and, and so I just finished working with a who's, who's been trying for seven years to get an IEP for her daughter. And, and so I, I, I can tell you evaluation request letters, get people's attention and, and it sometimes it's the yeah. Yeah. Uh, and, and, and so what, it's a request, an evaluation request later is just putting school on notice that you as a parent have, uh, have suspect that your child has, uh, uh, a disability. And you'd like to find out if, if they fact in fact do have a disability, uh, you know, parents are, are entitled to, to get a, uh, a psychological and an educational evaluations.

Steve:

Some will go for a, what's called a neuropsychological evaluation, which is a little more in depth. Uh, sometimes parents have, uh, things aren't going academically well for their kids. Sometimes it's behavioral issues. And, and here's an important word, two words that parents always have to put in their letter, and that is adverse impact.

What is, what is, or is it happening? That's having an adverse impact on your child's free and appropriate public education. And, and so sometimes it helps to, to put in free and appropriate public education, adverse impact. It gets people's attention really does. Uh, sometimes it's about functional skills and, and a lot of the clients that I work with, uh, they have executive functioning deficits. They, they, they have trouble getting started on a task. They have trouble going and completing a task. They have trouble with organization and planning and, and response inhibition.

Steve:

And, um, sometimes they're short term memory is, is dysfunctional. Uh, and, and so, you know, those APS just, aren't only for academics, they're also for these functional skills. And sometimes parents don't realize that. Um, and, and what happens is, um, there's a, there's a, a part in IDE it's called child find. And every school is, is, is obligated to publish a child. Find notice every year as a principal, I put it in my student handbook, so that, and parents had to sign off that they read the handbook so that I I'd have documentation that we published our child find notice, uh, schools usually have, uh, what's called a pre-referral team. And, uh, sometimes how they, how, how the team will get the letter. There, there are couple of ways that kids could be referred for evaluation. One is the teachers are usually the first ones that see issues.

Steve:

Okay. And so they can bring it to the attention of the administrator who, uh, is in charge of the pre-referral team. Then the administrator contacts, the parents says, Hey, you know, the teachers are seeing some things with your, with your student. Uh, and we'd like for you to come in for a meeting so that we can discuss possible evaluation, okay. Or the parent can send the letter. And, and I always that when parents send this letter, I, I, I, I suggest that they send it to the principal, the assistant principal, the school counselor, uh, the teachers and the intervention specialists, so that everybody becomes aware that I suspect that my child has a disability. I always like to spread around the accountability. Um, and so what, what happens? Um, there's a meeting. And if, if, if I, as a parent make the, make the request, uh, the administrator will give everybody at the table, a copy of my letter. And, and, and so, you know, there's two things that can happen at that pre-referral meeting either. They say that the team says, yep, we'll evaluate. Or they say, no, we're not going to evaluate. And then the parent has to figure out, you know, what they want to do after that. Cause they do have other recourses, uh, when they don't agree with the decision and, and that, so that's when the team gets to see the letter.

Stephanie :

What do they only do you only send the evaluation request letter for initial eligibility? Or can this be because from, from my understanding, please, correct me if I'm wrong. So evaluations and reevaluations happen every three years, but a parent can request every year, a new evaluation, the school doesn't have to do it every single year, but they can request it. Is this something that could be used for that or is the evaluation request letter only for initials?

Steve:

Oh, I, I think, I always say put things in writing document, document documents, start the paper trail. And, and so for the initial, uh, evaluation. Yep. Uh, I, I work with parents and I get as much information about the, I draft the letter. Okay. And I get as much information from the parent about what their kiddo is going through and in all the difficulties and everything. And then I draft the letter and send it back to the parent saying, you know, put, check this out, add or subtract anything you want. That's fine. This is your letter. And, and, and I always, uh, suggest that they, uh, deliver two ways, one hand deliver the letter and two, send it through email. Sometimes things get lost. I don't, I'm sure the us postal service does a great job. Sometimes letters get lost.

Stephanie :

They do get lost frequently.

Steve:

So I suggest hand deliver it to the secretary and, and, and then follow it up with an email. We got two sources of documentation.

Stephanie :

I think that's smart. Cuz emails also go to spam. Especially if you're emailing school districts. They have really strong firewalls that put a lot of emails in spam or they don't deliver them at all. They just go, I don't even know where they go. They just go to like email purgatory or something. But I love that you said do it twice, like send the email, but also hand deliver it.

Steve:

And, and I also encourage parents to do, uh, a parent input statement, um, just to preserve their, their, their rights, their kiddos rights. Um, and, and, and to make sure everything's covered. And, and as you said, you know, I, it's always about letters. It's always about letters. So anything you want always send a letter.

Stephanie :

Yes. And if you're like, what is a parent input statement? How do I write that? We have some other trainings coming up here in the summer PD series, all about parent input statements and beyond par input statements. So we've got you covered with that, but we're gonna keep talking about the evaluation request letter. So that letter, what needs to be in the letter? Like, what are the key points? Are there certain, like, I know you said, uh, adverse effects and FA putting all those buzzwords, like, are there other specific keywords that she be in this letter or different parts of this letter, fill us in,

Steve:

Um, meaningful progress that, you know, my, my kids having trouble making meaningful progress here at your school. Uh, and, and so here, here's what I say, it's

all about the data. You know, what, if you don't have data, you're just another person with an opinion. And, and so I, I, I encourage the parents to give me as much data as they have so that I can, I can make sure it gets in the letter. Other, the, the data that I asked the parents for is, did they save their, their kiddos student work? It comes home those worksheets. Cause, cause, and, and, and I, I was able to, uh, help a parent who had these, all of these papers and, and, and, and the kid was in passing. And so we used that as, as part of our, our, or letter district assessment scores, whether those be formal, like, uh, the, uh, measurement of academic progress or map testing, or sometimes, uh, districts will do their own kind of, uh, testing checkup to see how the, the kids are making progress.

Steve:

I look at state assessment scores now, when, when, when we're talking scores and things, sometimes that doesn't parents don't have the background to analyze the scores and, and, and what all of the, uh, the scores mean. So that's where I come in and I help them. And I ask them, I, I need that. Give me give, gimme that information. Uh, I, I tell them, I want all your notes from school and I want your emails that teachers have sent you cause that that's data. Okay. Um, and, um, then I, I look at behavioral referrals. Okay. Maybe it's a behavior issue. I wanna know. I wanna know how many times they've been referred to the office. I wanna know the days they've been referred. I wanna know the times and I wanna know the locations cuz that helps me to, uh, show the need. Okay. Um, probably, and I also ask the parents, do you have anything from the school counselor? Have you had to meet with the school counselor? Okay. Um, and by the way, I always suggest whenever you have a conversation with anybody at school, always do a follow up, uh, email that just says, thanks for, uh, talking with me about my, my child and their, um, and their suspected disability or their difficulty here at school.

Stephanie :

And teachings can even do that as well. Yeah. Send the follow up email to, to conversations and conferences or phone calls that you have with, with, with parents. I think that also involves parents in the IEP process, but I love that.

Steve:

Yeah. Memories degrade over time. Yes

Stephanie :

They

Steve:

Do. And, and if it's in writing it, it's in writing, let me, let me rephrase that. If it not in writing, it never happened and it was never discussed or agreed upon. So, so that's important and here is one other special, uh, place where you can get really, uh, good data. And I think a lot of people overlooked this, the school nurse.

Stephanie :

Yes.

Steve:

How many times has my kid come to you? And, and, and do you think it's real or imaginary? Is it, is it that, do they have a temperature and you know, and, and so you can, you can get a lot of information just by talking to, to the school nurse cuz they see everybody in the building and they, they, they pretty much know when, when kids are, are having issues. And so that, that's an important thing I, I would capitalize on.

Stephanie :

I love that. You mentioned that cuz when I taught at the high school, um, I, at the high school level, I, I was an IST facilitator in the state of Delaware instructional support team facilitator. And I worked with students who were not identified as special ed. They didn't qualify, but they still needed that extra help. And one of the processes to have that student, like on my caseload was sending out all of this paperwork and I had a nurse form and it was purple. I color coded my paperwork. Of course I did. But I always, and the data, the information that they would share, like, wow. So I'm glad that you brought that up because yes, the nurse is golden.

Steve:

Golden's a, sometimes their information can be the turning point.

Stephanie :

Yeah.

Steve:

So, um, but yeah, there's uh, and as you write this letter, keep the staff out of it. You know, this is not a place to complain it's as I say, it's just about the facts. Just put the, just gimme the facts and, and, and you can editorialize all you want later, but, but, but right now we just need the facts. And um, so no opinions in the, in the letter,

Stephanie :

I think that it's important for teachers that are listening to this train, to just be aware of how we can take this information and use it to help parents, whether we're a gen ed teacher or a special ed teacher, maybe the parent wants additional testing because they suspect the child has a different disability or they're now ex like they're now seeing maybe the child has dyslexia or dyscalculia or something. And, um, as teachers, we know that we walk a very fine line between, um, keeping our job and advocating for our students. So having this training in your back pocket and knowing what to say and how to collaborate and team up with the parents so that they can do the, a legwork. So you don't get fired. Um, you're also building that rapport, but I think this is great. Just information to keep in mind when it comes to evaluation request letters and even just any request letters in general. Um, I think that's

important to remember, well, why is it important? I know you keep saying, put the letter in writing, put the letter in writing, and I know you probably already answered this question, but I kind of want you to repeat your answer because I think it's really important. Why is it important for the letter to be in writing and not just a verbal request?

Steve:

Um, the, the parent request letter triggers, I D a timelines and again, it's, there's, there's schools have so many days to act on, on, on, on requests. And, um, so, so that that's important. You gotta get those timelines triggered. Um, and then, um, again, it goes back to document, document document, you, you know, in real estate they say that three most important things are location, location, location, three most important things in special education document, document dot

Stephanie :

That's so accurate.

Steve:

Ah, you just gotta have it. And again, if it, if it, if it's not written down, it was never said, okay, so, so that's the, uh, thing and it, conversations are nice, but people may forget is, is your parent. You walk through the hallway, you say, oh, Hey, my kids having trouble, you know, can, can you do something? Can you help me? And, and, and so it was never written down that you asked for help. Okay. So if you do talk with folks, you send that follow up email. Okay. Uh, with that. And so again, it, it, it just starts the paper trail.

Stephanie :

Yes. So, so important.

Steve:

And, and, and one of the things I, I stress to my parents is you gotta have an IEP binder. You gotta have this folder. You gotta be organized. When you walk into an IEP meeting with this binder, it shows that you're an IEP meeting us like a business meeting. You come dressed for the business meeting, you come prepared for the business meeting. And, and, and, and, and so when you walk through with, and you're not fumbling around looking for documents during any kind of, uh, special ed meeting, you, you look you're prepared.

Stephanie :

Absolutely. And I have, um, I've created, um, at our sister site, Mrs. D's corner. I have a parent binder that I created that you can share with parents. I'll link that below. And I also have a teacher one because I there's so much paperwork that teachers go through and that we have to deal with. It's important to keep all of the IEP things organized. So I'll link both of those below this video so that you have them

just in your teach your toolkit as well, um, for when it comes to evaluation request letters, but also organization and just all of the special ed paperwork.

Steve:

And just to let you know, I do have your, uh, I E P organization binder.

Stephanie :

Oh goodness. That's awesome. Oh,

Steve:

It's, it's really good. It's really good. You know. Well, thank you.

Stephanie :

Thank you. Well, what is your best piece of advice for helping parents request an evaluation?

Steve:

Number one it's, it's, it's easy to say probably sometimes tough to do, but you gotta have letter writing etiquette. Uh, you know, again, it's just the facts. Um, keep your letter focused on the child, not the staff here are the issues my child is having just the facts. Ma'am just the facts. You always remember this after you've messed up, but always double check spelling and crap,

Steve:

Be clear, concise, and profess be professional above all. Okay. Just be professional. It's I, IEP meetings are stressful enough. Uh, and, and I, and I think by being professional, uh, we can take the stress out out of the, out of, out of the meeting. And again, keep your language professional. That, that, that's just really important. It, it, to me, it's about, if I give respect, I get respect just like a mirror. Boom. Give it whatever you give out. You're gonna give back that that's true. Always keep being professional. Um, avoid belaboring your point. I, I can, I can tell you just, if, if I had to read a letter and, and it might be three or four pages long, I don't know. But, but once I get into all of the negative stuff and, and all that, I kind of quit reading. Um, it, it just, it it's just, you know, we'll, we'll go from there.

Steve:

Um, always, always, always use the title of the people from the school that you're working with. Okay. Is it, is it, is it Dr. Dr. Johnson? Is it Ms. Jones, Mr. Jones, Ms. White, uh, it's always important to use their titles. Okay. It's again, it's just a show of respect, um, letters avoid being casual again, because it is a business letter. Uh, and I can't say it enough, just the facts, just the fact, just the data, just the data. Um, and again, after, after you, uh, uh, send the, before you send the letter, let one, your friends read over it, they'll pick up things that you may have missed. Cause you you've, you, I don't know how many parents rewrite those letters a lot. And sometimes they're so used to it that they might miss things. And, and so it's always

good to let others read your letter and see if it makes sense. How's the tone and, and, uh, you know, try to clear up any mistakes that you may have made.

Stephanie :

I let my husband read emails five to send emails and I have to be stern. Is that the word I let him read them to make sure that I'm not being a jerk, but I'm getting my point of, um, so I think that's important just to remember, even for teachers that we need to make sure all of those things apply to anything that we send out as well.

Steve:

Absolutely. I, I read and reread everything that I send down

Stephanie :

So important. Well, I have loved this conversation about evaluation request letters. I think that this is great information, not only for teachers, but also as for parents as well. Well, it was for parents, but vice versa. It was great for parents, but also great for teachers. Well, to hear all of this information, so we know how to help parents when they want to go through with requesting something. I think that's really important. So thank you so much for being here, Steven sharing all of that information. Um, where can we find you or how can we connect with you outside of this training?

Steve:

You can connect with me through email at RS hu H U T D O N 0 9 5. Gmail do com again, that's RS hu nine five gmail.com.

Stephanie :

Awesome. And I will link Steve's email below this training, so you can click and go and I'll link all of the other things we talked about below this video as well. So if you wanna do additional learning, um, or watch a training on something else that's related to this, you have that at your fingertips to just click and go. Thank you again, Steve so much for being here today, I have enjoyed our time talking about evaluation, request letters, um, something new to me. So you were teaching me as well. And thank y'all for being here to learn more about how we can help as teachers support our parents and getting students the supports that they need and to serve. So thank y'all all for being here. We will see you all in the next chat.