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The IEP Cycle: The General Educator's Role

A general educator must be included if the student is or may be participating in the regular education environment. Without the general education teacher's participation, it would be harder for the IEP (Individualized Education Program) team to take on its responsibilities for looking at a student's progress in the general education curriculum, standards, and assessments.

The general education teacher also brings to the IEP team process the knowledge of:

- The general education curriculum.
- How the student learns best, what works and what doesn't work
- How the student with disabilities performs in a general education context.
- How the student interacts with her peers.
- What the stressors are, actual or potential, and advise planning for them.
- The pace of the class.
- How the IEP team can be most successful in collaborating when the student is in general education classes.
- The other students and the dynamics of the class.
- Approaches for teaching the class as a whole.
- How to partner with the parent for academic success.

When general education teachers are new to the IEP team, it will help if they understand their specific roles. In addition, general educators who have participated in IEP team meetings before may find that their roles may shift. They may be accustomed to presenting their observations and thoughts about the student to the IEP team, but not to being a vital part of the process from beginning to end. Teachers also often think of an IEP meeting as another parent conference and present grades and missing assignments. A team member should help prepare new teachers to contribute appropriately to the meeting.

General education teachers need to know that they are important players. They need to know what they are expected to contribute to the process and what kinds of support they will receive in return. For example, substantive help and support in helping a diverse group of students to learn effectively.

To be part of the IEP team, general educators will need to look at their own beliefs and biases regarding students with disabilities. It is important to own up to biases where they exist, but not let them color one's attitude toward a particular student. To be an effective part of the IEP process, general educators will also need to:

1. Know how to **communicate effectively** and work within a team context.
2. Know how to **observe special education students** and record their behaviors objectively in order to help IEP teams track these students' progress.
3. **Describe a student's performance** and behaviors to emphasize the student's strengths.
 - Some general educators will need to learn how to describe a student's progress, weaknesses, and needs in appropriate, positive language. The idea is to describe the progress the student is

making, no matter how small, and to focus on how to get to the next step. For example, "Jim can't add" is vague, derogatory, and doesn't describe what Jim can do. "Jim can count up to twenty by ones. We are working on having him count to fifty." is more positive, accurate, and points to the next goal.

[See Positive Descriptions of Student Behavior](#)

4. **Convey** to the other IEP team members **an acceptance and willingness to actively participate** in the IEP process.
5. Be willing to **try new approaches** in working with students with special needs.
6. Be willing to **ask for additional assistance** when this is needed.

The purpose of the general educator's role on the IEP team is to get accurate, reliable data on the student's behavior and progress toward meeting her annual goals.

The IEP has a section in which the general educators can describe any support they need to help a student to attain her goals and participate in the general curriculum. This provides an opportunity for the general education teacher to describe what kind of training or assistance would help in carrying out the IEP.