

MEMORANDUM

To: Leah Voorhies, Assistant Superintendent of Student Support, and the Utah State Board of Education (USBE)

From: Utah Special Education Advisory Panel (Panel)

Subject: Meaningful IEPs (Parent Involvement, Team Member Involvement, High Expectations for Students with Disabilities)

Date: May 24, 2019

In our role as an advisory panel to the USBE, we would like to provide input and recommendations to the Special Education Services section of the USBE to improve services for students with disabilities in the area of meaningful IEPs. We would like to encourage meaningful parent involvement, encourage participation of all team members, and have high expectations for students with disabilities. The following are the recommendations of the Panel:

- 1) We want to empower parents to be meaningful IEP team members. A given parent may not initially, or fully, take advantage of such opportunity and responsibility, but it should be available to all. Empowerment comes from access to information, an understanding of rights and responsibilities, and an ability to effectively navigate and appropriately contribute to the IEP process. This could be accomplished in several formats, including sample written documents, mentors, a dedicated state web site, and/or third-party resources. A web site could outline the process and provides video clips of sample IEP team meetings and services, and also include definitions of rights; roles of those participating; available services; explanations of documents, testing, supports, goals and timelines. This empowerment should begin at the Child Find stage and should be emphasized and reiterated throughout the process and before each meeting.
- 2) It is recommended that a resource packet be developed to give to parents when they sign consent for an initial evaluation. While some LEAs provide this, it is recommended that USBE develop a resource packet that could be available on the USBE website. The packet could include such resources as the Utah Parent Center, Disability Law Center, parent education programs provided by the LEAs, etc.
- 3) It is recommended that training programs for administrator re-instate the required special ed law class which is currently not a required course. Administrators need to be better prepared in special ed law to understand their obligations as an LEA to provide FAPE to all their learners receiving special education services in their school and their obligation to direct all team members to work collaboratively to address students need.
- 4) There needs to be better communication between IEP team members prior to the meeting. Oftentimes, the parents are the only ones in attendance who haven't already seen the data

and they need time to process the data. IEP teams need to think outside the box to create opportunities for the parents, general ed teacher, and related service providers to give input before goals are developed. The Panel would like USBE to provide guidance to LEA's in developing a more consistent communication system to share information across all team members, emphasizing parents as team members, in preparation for IEP meetings. Examples of this system could be a communication portal with links to enter input; group emails, parent interviews, link for additional resources on Notice of Meeting, etc. This would decrease the stress and increase input from parents and allow them time to process the data. Additionally, it would allow the general ed teacher to be more involved in the drafting of the goals and give meaningful input.

- 5) Preservice programs for general education teachers (both traditional and non-traditional) need to provide required courses on how to provide meaningful participation in the IEP process. This required course needs to be addressed as part of the licensure requirements to ensure that all routes to licensure receive this training. Currently, the required course does not address the scope of understanding teachers will need to have in order to be an effective team member, but instead just introduces them to the terminology of special education and disabilities. There needs to be an increased emphasis placed in licensing on this skill.
- 6) Per federal law, all IEP team members (parents, general ed teacher, special ed teacher, LEA, and professionals who can interpret evaluations) need to be present or the parent in writing and the LEA consent to the excusal prior to the date of the IEP meeting. Failure to do so is grounds for initiating dispute resolution. It has been the experience of many on the Panel that this requirement is frequently overlooked in LEAs in our state so this needs to be addressed by USBE.
- 7) Technical assistance and professional development are recommended for all LEA employee team members to address the culture around collaboration time during release/prep time to prepare for IEP meetings and to instill in all team members that they are valuable participants in the IEP process. Professional development being offered by LEAs should meet established state criteria so there is a consistency across LEAs. This professional development could be linked to licensing and re-licensing just as Ethics requirements are. It is also recommended that Educators should not be grandfathered into the SPED Professional Development because of their years of experience or even SPED licensing or endorsements. There needs to be consistency in training.
- 8) It is recommended to disseminate and implement HCR 14 Encouraging High Expectations for Students with Disabilities to all LEAs.
- 9) There needs to be a means developed to measure the effective and meaningful participation in the IEP meeting. This could be adding a box to the IEP asking, "Do you feel that you had meaningful participation in the development of this IEP? Do you need more resources to understand your rights?"

Thank you for your time and consideration in reviewing these recommendations. We as a Panel appreciate all of your efforts on behalf of children with disabilities throughout the State of Utah.