
Before questions were asked the panel went over the process of the IEP. Here is a summary of their opening remarks:

The first step in the process is assessment. To determine whether a child is eligible for special education services we are looking at all the areas we (parent included) consider as a possible deficit or disability. We assess in those areas. The assessment must be in areas that are educationally relevant. We look at what is impacting the child's progress or their ability to succeed, both academically and socially. Kids need to be able to function in both areas. We have 60 days to complete the assessment starting on the day we receive the parent's sign consent for assessment. We can provide the assessment findings prior to the IEP but there is no a legal requirement to do so. We agree, however, that it is best practices for everyone to get the reports out before the IEP. We do our best but for a variety of unavoidable reasons, we do not always get it to you ahead of time. The purpose of the report is to determine eligibility and level of service. From there, we look at the present levels of performance and deficient and areas the student needs to work on. We ask how we are going to change those deficits through goals and objectives. We then determine where and who will conduct the services. Sometimes when we have meetings with parents they are anxious to get services but in order to get an accurate answer on where and who should conduct the services, we need to go through the right steps.

Q: What can be done about bullying of children with special needs in school sports. How can we educate coaches about how to handle issues that arrive with children with special needs?

A: This may be more relevant to upper division schools as very few elementary schools have organized sports teams. Certainly the expertise of the people on the IEP team might be helpful to you. As a parent your role in your child's life is to help your child. It is important to let the coach know what your child struggles with. If you do not know what strategies would work, turn to the IEP team for suggestions. This should come up during the IEP and be addressed in the IEP.

It is really important that you let the coach know about a child's disabilities right off the bat. It is very helpful to the coach to have this information. Sometimes it eases some of the tension and helps troubleshoot issues and makes it a more positive and open experience. It is to your child's benefit to let your child's coach know that they may have a different learning style.

FOLLOW-UP: Is it possible to put in the IEP that coaches will be instructed how to communicate with your child?

A: This is part of the regular communication when you collaborate with staff.

Q: Is it true that some professionals do not believe in auditory processing?

The speech pathologist is typically part of the evaluation and she would be testing for language comprehension, i.e., auditory or language processing disorders. It can be done but it is not typically done as part of the assessment.

We do not diagnose, we determine eligibility.

Q: The current pre-school program is a segregated program with no typical peers in the classroom. What are the plans to make the pre-school program a blended program including typical peers, thus enabling an easier transition to kindergarten? How far advanced are the plans? What are the obstacles? Will there be a fee charged to parents of typical kids included in such a program?

A: The current preschool program is the Early Childhood Learning Center (ECLC) and it is not the only program. We have kids fully included, some kids dually enrolled in preschool and ECLC. This goes back to the team, how to best service the child's needs. Plans for the future include blended programs [of mainstream and special ed students]. We have been looking at this for quite for a while. It is on hold until the next school year, perhaps August. We envision perhaps 2 or 3 typical children in a class. A nominal fee may be charged and we have looked in the community to see what other preschools are charging.

Comment from Special Ed Teacher: I taught an integrated class. I never saw difficulty transitioning from all special education peers with mixed typical peers. Classroom routine is the biggest thing that becomes difficult. Kids from ECLC are more prepared than kids who never went to preschool. They are used to being in school, waiting for naps, snacks. There is no difficulty in transitioning them.

Comment from ECLC Director: ECLC kids were by far the best behaved kids and some of the most prepared kids. We ran a pre-k program and they do a really good job of blending in.

Q: I'm concerned about my child not getting homework in the ECLC. Will she be prepared for Kindergarten?

A: It would be inappropriate for preschool. No preschools give homework. Kindergarten introduces homework very gently into the curriculum.

Q: What is the district's policy regarding visual processing disorders? It seems as if vision therapy is no longer being supported by the district, but rather in-class remedies are being sought. Is this the case?

There is not a district policy on any strategy on vision approach. We are always looking at various strategies that generalize the most. A lot of the strategies are designed for one-on-one with an adult who is really skilled, but then the therapy does not generalize well in the classroom.

No vision therapies are research-based and there are a lot of them out there. I want something that is going to work for this kid in a classroom setting.

[Vision therapy] is not research-based. There is no basis. They can't show transference of what is gained into the classroom. We are finding that there are interventions, there are exercises children can do in the classroom, materials they use in the classroom, and that is more of a tie-in with the classroom.

Follow-up: Does that mean there is one kind of therapy for all children?

A: Just as with any assessment, there are different interventions.

Q: What is the district's position about social development? Public education is about more than book learning; it is also about social interaction, behavior and development. Especially for children on the autism spectrum social interaction is the largest obstacle to learning.

We do not have a position or policy on any of this.

Most IEPs address social skills and language pragmatics. If it is determined to be an area of need, there should be a goal for it. Parents need to communicate if they have social skills goals that are not being addressed or they know of problems in this area.

We are seeing a lot more assessment tools on social development that are giving us the standardized "why" a child is having having difficulty. As we are seeing an increase of kids diagnosed with autism, we are seeing a lot more research into these issues. In the past, it was harder.

If you are not comprehending your social world, you may not be comprehending in the classroom.

If [social skills] is an area of suspected disability, yes, [the IEP team] should look at it. One of the things also to keep in mind is that the social world changes for kids. When they are small they are often rule followers and want to please the adults. When they get on the playground with kids, younger kids have more structure. When the world becomes more peer-driven and it is cool to wear a certain jeans, it gets more difficult and social issues change. The IEP goals may change.

If you notice that your child is having social issues on the playground this should be communicated to the teacher so it can be looked out for. It should be noted and discussed with your case manager and other service providers. It is a big part of the process and plays into a lot of questions here tonight. The more communication the fewer surprises.

A positive outcome is that it trickles down to the support staff. Our plan for next year is to make sure all the first graders, not just special ed, are given extra support the first few days of school on the playground.

Note: Every attempt was made to transcribe this information accurately.

Q: In elementary school, can a parent request testing for phonemic awareness?

Phonemics is identifying the sound that goes with the letter of the alphabet. Phonemic awareness is being able to hear the separate parts of a word, November No-ven-ber. Cat, hat, boat. There is a lot of support out there for kids who need phonemic awareness support.

Chances are if it is not the student's triennial and they enter kindergarten, they get tested for it the first week of school. Throughout those primary grades the test is given and the tests build upon each other. If your child is in the upper grades and is not given the test, it should still show up in the academic assessment, and it could be given at that time. You can ask for it but chances are it has already been done.

There are standardized tests and others available. It is based on identifying a need to have a specific phonemical issue. There are a lot of strategies out there to help kids.

Q: I have been to a number of CAC meetings with District Personnel, who have promised to improve the speed with which parents receive IEP testing results so that parents have the paperwork before the scheduled IEP. So far, I have seen little improvement in this area. Can you outline district policy for expediting paperwork so that time and money are not wasted at the IEP going over information parents have never seen before?

A: We continually talk about and reinforce with all staff the benefits of getting paperwork out early. Sometimes we lose assessment days because the child is absent or pulled for other reasons. Oftentimes we need those 60 days to complete an accurate assessment. We are already cutting ourselves short and doing the best we can. There are teams that are getting it out there and there are others who struggle more. Sometimes they are juggling too many triennials and other IEPs.

We all are trying to get the reports out more and we all see the benefit in getting the reports out earlier. It has been really helpful for us when parents give us their email address so we can shoot the reports off late at night and not have to worry about reports [going home] in backpacks.

Sometimes parents do get the report ahead of time and we still have to go over it at the IEP because they didn't look at it.

Q: I am very involved in my child's education and the implementation of his IEP but I feel it's very difficult to get my input on his goals included or even heard at our IEP meetings. Please provide some guidance.

A: Parent participation in IEP's is not a matter of district policy; it is the law and a requirement. We want to know about the child's outside activities, we think it is valuable; we also would be appreciative of this information prior to the meeting so we have that incorporated into our baseline. That would help us. We want to consider it, we are mandated to consider it, and we think it helps bring out a more accurate picture of the child. There are very specific criteria on parent participation. [It is important to make sure there is meaningful dialog [between parents and IEP team]. Email is very handy and it is something you can do when you get a chance. For the teacher, when their day is over, email is very effective and one way of getting your input across. Another way is notes. Some parents and teachers have written communication going back and forth, along with parent teacher conferences. We definitely want your input, [and want to get information on] private evaluations.

On private assessments: One of the frustrating things is that we can't be certain of [what outside] assessments [are being done]. Because the assessments cannot be done more than one time in six months or a year and if we do not know that outside evaluations are being done, it invalidates the tests we are doing. It makes it more challenging. If I am aware of [outside assessments that are being done], I can do a different test.

When a parent feels the tests are relevant to their child's education and did not share them with me and when I got the results, it often informs me on how to better modify curriculum. Let your teacher or case manager know what your intentions are. What drives your reasons for the private assessment is important too.

Q: I've heard of IUSD's autism program in elementary and secondary schools. If on my IEP I request that my child be part of the autism program, what would that look like?

A: It depends. There is a continuum of options listed in the handbook on the website. Where services are to be provided is just a location and I think parents get confused with the name of the school and the program. Our special education programs are not the schools' programs. Those programs can move [or change] for a variety of reasons, i.e., not enough site space, too many specialized programs at one site, transportation costs of a group of kids 10 miles away. We want to keep that separate. The handbook lists the different services [available in the district].