

Viewing the IEP as a “Journey”

Think about the preparation and implementation of an Individual Education Plan as if you were getting ready for an incredible journey. Like a well-prepared traveler, you will have a map. This map will begin where the student is currently, and proceed to a destination which may include roadblocks, detours, beautiful sights, new acquaintances, and unexpected surprises along the way. Prior to traveling, you will do some research, talk with the student and student’s parent/guardian about their plans for the trip, consider your resources and gather interesting facts. For this journey, your map will need to include very specific directions, so that you and your fellow travelers will not make any wrong turns. The map will be used throughout the venture, and may need to be altered if another route is chosen along the way.

“An IEP is a culmination of collaborative sharing of insights and ideas, goals, objectives/benchmarks and resources. It is also a legal document (Jennifer Krumins, 2008).” Educators carry out their legal responsibility by observing deadlines, completing the IEP, conducting the meeting and obtaining necessary signatures. To insure that the IEP document is effective for the student, it should be used regularly, rather than put away in a drawer or file.

Here are 10 tips for creating and implementing IEPs, so that they truly can be used as a map for the coming year.

1. Make the goals **SMART!**

S= Specific (stated in clear and concrete terminology)

M= Measurable (statements in measurable terms that contain the condition, clearly defined behavior and the performance criteria desired)

A= Achievable (enable the student to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum to the extent possible)

R= Realistic (designed to meet each of the student’s educational needs that result from his/her disability)

T=Timely (reasonable expectations that can be accomplished within a twelve-month period)

2. Once the IEP document has been completed, keep a copy of the student’s goals, objectives and/or benchmarks in chart form in a binder or in an electronic file. This will make progress monitoring easier.
3. In high school settings (or as appropriate), create a “Travel Card” (a mini IEP) that the student brings with him/her to each class. This chart should combine a record of the annual goal(s) and the objectives/benchmarks with a tracking system enabling the teacher or student to record progress.
4. Create a simple tracking sheet or anecdotal record chart that matches the specific objective or benchmark and find opportunities for teacher or student to collect and record the data.



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5. In order to make the IEP goals meaningful (and accountable) for parents and students, post the goals and objectives inside a student binder that goes home with the student so parents/guardians have easy access and are kept informed.
6. Use the actual IEP document to “pencil in” anecdotal notes as observations are made and data is collected. Too often, people think IEPs must be filed away and are untouchable. Do remember to honor confidentiality.
7. On the actual IEP document, record dates and comments as objectives/benchmarks are achieved.
8. Use sticky notes or make notes on the IEP document when it is observed that an objective or benchmark needs to be broken down into simpler steps or modified in some way.
9. Record on the IEP document (or on your chart) successful/unsuccessful teaching strategies and resources as they are identified.
10. Meet with the student often to reflect upon the IEP goals, objectives and benchmarks. Encourage the student to monitor his/her progress and celebrate success!

This “tip sheet” was adapted from the article: *12 Ways to Make Individual Education Plans Useful and Meaningful*, by Jennifer Krumins. Published in the Canadian Teacher Magazine, Spring 2008.

