CONTENT AND TRENDS IN INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP) ANNUAL GOALS FOR STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT NEEDS

Kathryn Burke, MEd, Jennifer Kurth, PhD, Karrie Shogren, PhD, Andrea Ruppar, PhD
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INTRODUCTION

Inquiry: What expectations are set for students with significant support needs?

- Students with significant support needs...
  - Require ongoing pervasive support
  - Typically served under educational classification of intellectual disability, autism, developmental disabilities, or multiple disabilities
  - Typically participate in alternate assessments

(Taub, McCord, & Ryndak, 2017)
Current educational climate
- Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; 2015) – high standards for all students
  - “Merely more than de minimis” is insufficient
  - Students are entitled to an educational program reasonably calculated to make progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances

IEPs and Measurable Annual Goals
- IEPs must include a statement of measurable annual goals (both academic and functional) to enable the student to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum and meet other educational needs of the student resulting from their disability

Previous Research
- Analyses show low-quality IEP goals for students with significant support needs
  - Not linked to academic standards (e.g., Ruble, McGrew, Dalrymple, & Jung, 2010)
  - Targeting non-functional skills (Giangreco, Dennis, Edelman, & Cloninger, 1994)
  - Difference in goal quality based on placement (Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010) and age (LaSalle, Roach, & McGrath, 2013)
Rationale for Goals based on Grade-Level Standards
- Students’ rights to a full educational opportunity
- Relevance of a standards-based curriculum for students with significant support needs
- Yet unknown potential of students with significant support needs
- Misconception of functional skills as a prerequisite for academic learning
- Inadequacy of a functional curriculum to replace a standards-based curriculum
- Limitations to an individualized curriculum
- Students’ achievements as the driver of changing expectations

(Courtaud, Spooner, Browder, & Jimenez, 2011)

Goals that Incorporate Self-Determination
- Self-determination is “a dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the causal agent in one’s life. Self-determined people (i.e., causal agents) act in service to freely chosen goals” (Shogren et al., 2015, p. 258)
- Evidence shows promoting self-determination leads to enhanced academic and postschool outcomes
- Two ways in which IDEA incorporates self-determination into the IEP process are through requirements for
  a) student involvement on the IEP team whenever appropriate, and
  b) consideration of students’ strengths, interests and preferences during transition planning

Research Questions
1. What instructional domains are addressed in the IEP goals of students with significant support needs?
2. What skills associated with self-determination (i.e., choice making, decision making, problem solving, goal setting and attainment, planning, self-management, self-advocacy, self-awareness, and self-knowledge) are addressed in the IEP goals of students with significant support needs?
3. What content related to student compliance is present in IEP goals?
Sample
- IEPs for 88 K-12 students with significant support needs
  - From KS, WI, MO, CA, CO, and FL
  - 63 males, 25 females
  - Ranged in age from 5 to 18; mean age of 10.9

Disability labels
- autism spectrum disorder ($n = 31$)
- intellectual disability ($n = 20$)
- multiple disabilities ($n = 8$)
- other health impairment ($n = 6$)
- orthopedic impairment ($n = 6$)
- developmental disability ($n = 3$)
- specific learning disability ($n = 3$)
- emotional behavior disorder ($n = 2$)
- hearing impairment ($n = 1$)
- missing information ($n = 8$)

Sample (continued)

Educational placement
- $\leq 40\%$ in general education ($n = 38$)
- $\geq 80\%$ in general education ($n = 24$)
- $41\% - 79\%$ in general education ($n = 19$)
- missing information ($n = 7$)

Complex communication needs
- Defined as significant difficulties producing natural speech in order to express daily communication needs (Beukelman & Miranda, 2013)
  - $n = 46$

Behavior support plans
- $n = 32$
Coding

**Instructional Domain**
- Reading
- Math
- Writing
- Science
- Social studies
- Social skills/communication
- Functional/daily living skills
- Motor skills
- Behavior
- Vocational/employment

**Skills Associated with Self-Determination**
- Choice making
- Decision making
- Problem solving
- Goal setting and attainment
- Planning
- Self-management and self-regulation
- Self-advocacy
- Self-awareness and self-knowledge

**Student Compliance**
- Yes/No
- Defined as complying or responding to a directive from another person, without criteria for learning or demonstrating a specific skill

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**RESULTS**

**Results**

Number of IEPs by Goal Domains and Skills Associated with Self-Determination
Results

**Number of IEPs by Goal Domains and Skills Associated with Self Determination**

- **n = 143 goals**
- 43 speech and language therapy goals: Trends: speech production, expressive and receptive language comprehension, expressing wants and needs, peer interactions.

- **n = 75 goals**
- Trends: reading comprehension, multi-skill, phonics, fluency.

- **n = 67 goals**
- Trends: operations, money, social studies.
Results

Number of IEPs by Goal Domains and Skills Associated with Self-Determination

$\text{n} = 52$ goals
Trends: classroom and school behaviors, following directions, emotional regulation, multi-skill

Results

Number of IEPs by Goal Domains and Skills Associated with Self-Determination

$\text{n} = 41$ goals
Trends: composition, handwriting, multi-skill

Results

Number of IEPs by Goal Domains and Skills Associated with Self-Determination

$\text{n} = 36$ goals
Trends: self-care, self-help, checks/checkbooks
Results

Number of IEPs by Goal Domains and Skills Associated with Self-Determination

n = 34 goals
Trends: social/communication (asking for help, communicating wants and needs, making requests)

Results

Number of IEPs by Goal Domains and Skills Associated with Self-Determination

n = 41 goals
9 physical therapy, 5 occupational therapy
Trends: fine motor, gross motor

Results

Number of IEPs by Goal Domains and Skills Associated with Self-Determination

n = 21 goals
9 physical therapy, 5 occupational therapy
Trends: task completion, career exploration, job search skills
Results

Number of KPIs by Goal Domains and Skills Associated with Self-Determination

- n = 15 goals
  - Trends: academic content (math)

- n = 12 goals
  - Trends: social/communication

- n = 4 goals
  - Trends: behavior
Results

Number of IEPs by Goal Domains and Skills Associated with Self-Determination

Other findings

- Only 28 IEPs with goals for reading, math, and writing; 18 IEPs without any goals for reading, math, or writing
- Limited alignment to educational standards or expectations for same-age peers
  - “improve reading skills by identifying her nickname”
  - “will stop when asked..., will come when called from greater and greater distances”
- Identical goals in different IEPs for reading, math, and vocational/employment
Other findings (continued)

- 98 goals required only compliance
  - Focus on obedience, imitation
    - “follow through with a demand with no more than 1 incident of physical aggression per day”
- Negatively worded behavior goals
  - “limit meltdowns”
  - “refrain from using physical force against peers or staff”

DISCUSSION

Interpretation

- Concerns about content (i.e., insufficient number of IEPs with goals linked to grade-level, general education curriculum)
  - May be in violation students’ rights (IDEA requires measurable annual goals to meet each of the child’s educational needs to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum)
  - Only one IEP with a goal for social studies or science
Interpretation (continued)

- Concerns about focus and language (i.e., overemphasis on compliance and common use of negatively worded goals)
  - Reflect obedience training – e.g., follow directions “on command (stop, sit, come here, stand up, etc.)”
  - May stigmatize students by focusing on functional skills outside the natural context

Limitations

- No classroom observations or IEP development information
- Cannot compare IEPs within classes or schools
- Did not analyze short term objectives
- Limited sample size and limited demographic information

Implications for Practice

1. Enhanced teacher training on IEP goal development
2. Attention to priorities reflected in IEP goals and language
3. Enhanced opportunities for students to be active participants in student-directed learning
Implications for Research

1. Explore how families perceive students’ IEP goals (in relation to IDEA) and avenues available to advocate for enhanced rigor

2. Examine how to plan and implement evidence-based academic instruction for students with significant support needs

3. Define how each of the skills associated with self-determination are operationalized and how teachers can integrate them into IEP goals

Questions?

Thank you!

Kathryn Burke  kathryn.burke@ku.edu
Jennifer Kurth  kthur@ku.edu
Karrie Shogren  shogren@ku.edu
Andrea Ruppar  ruppar@wisc.edu