

FRIENDSHIP CORNER

(Widening the Circle recommends Person Centered Planning (PCP) as one of the best ways to insure that attention is paid to relationships and friendships in the lives of people with disabilities. But, for various reasons, not everyone can access PCP. However, children with disabilities usually have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and many adults with disabilities are required to have an Individual Support Plan (ISP). Both of these planning processes, if used correctly, can contribute to social connections for the individual, including the possibility of friendships between people with and without disabilities. Our thanks to Judy Bouffard and Nancy Lucier from the Northeast Arc for contributing the following information on how to use the IEP to good effect for young people. The Summer 2016 "Advocate" will have a companion article by Robin Harmatz, DDS, on how to use the ISP to make connections and friendships.)

How to Use Your IEP to Promote Connections and Friendships

Individual education program participation at the fullest level possible is required by law. The law {34 CFR 300. 117} states the public agency must ensure that each child with a disability has the supplementary aids and services determined by the child's IEP Team to be appropriate and necessary for the child to participate in **nonacademic settings**. The IEP document should be utilized to facilitate all aspects of an individual's needs, not just educational requirements. **Social emotional activities that enhance friendships and community activities are imperative for developing leisure and vocational skills as well as social emotional growth!** In order to promote connections and friendships in the IEP it is important to understand the individualized supports accommodations and goals needed to access programs and activities.

To facilitate and develop friendships, social opportunities must be available to the student. What supports are needed for the student to make connections and friendships at school? Review what current supports the student utilizes to participate currently in the educational setting and will those supports be needed to access extracurricular, nonacademic activities. Determine what activities may interest the student. Social activities can include meals, recess periods, athletics, recreational activities, special interest groups, clubs sponsored by the school, etc. What will it take for the student to be successful participating in the chosen activities? Will they need a one-on-one to support them or a person to assist in facilitating a conversation? A peer mentor is an option as well, depending on the individual's needs.

At any time a team meeting can be requested to include extracurricular and nonacademic activities in the IEP. It is imperative that at this time the team determines any supports that are needed to ensure that the student with a disability can participate with their peers without disabilities. In some instances, in order for the student to take part in the activity successfully, there might need to be more supports than typically necessary. The team determines the supports necessary. The IEP can include social skills

goals for the student. Specific supports and/or accommodations for extracurricular activities can be listed under additional information in the IEP. How it is documented in the IEP is determined by the individual's needs.

The above information is an overall summary of how to include nonacademic and extracurricular services in the IEP, in order provide opportunities for connections and friendships.

For further information you can go to www.wrightslaw.com

The US Department of Education (<http://idea.ed.gov>) has lots more information that may help you, including the following specific sections:

Sec. 300.117 Nonacademic settings.

In providing or arranging for the provision of nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities, including meals, recess periods, and the services and activities set forth in Sec. 300.107, each public agency must ensure that each child with a disability participates with nondisabled children in the extracurricular services and activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of that child. The public agency must ensure that each child with a disability has the supplementary aids and services determined by the child's IEP Team to be appropriate and necessary for the child to participate in nonacademic settings. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(5))

Sec. 300.107 Nonacademic services.

The State must ensure the following:

(a) Each public agency must take steps, including the provision of supplementary aids and services determined appropriate and necessary by the child's IEP Team, to provide nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities in the manner necessary to afford children with disabilities an equal opportunity for participation in those services and activities.

(b) Nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities may include counseling services, athletics, transportation, health services, recreational activities, special interest groups or clubs sponsored by the public agency, referrals to agencies that provide assistance to individuals with disabilities, and employment of students, including both employment by the public agency and assistance in making outside employment available.

(Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(1))

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