



21st Century Community Learning Centers

Lessons From the Field: Serving All Students, Including Students With Disabilities



Topic Guide 8

Working With IEPs, Section 504 Plans and Transition Plans

After reading this guide, you'll be able to...

- ✓ Work with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Section 504 plans to support students' participation within the 21st CCLC environment.
- ✓ Support IEP transition planning and services.

Tools in this guide include...

- ✓ An action planning checklist, with links to selected resources.

Working With IEPs and Section 504 Plans

Students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Section 504 plans can provide 21st CCLC program staff with helpful information about meeting individual student needs.

What Is an IEP, and What Can It Tell You?

An IEP is a document that describes an educational program designed to meet the learning needs of a child who has a disability.¹ Created by a team of education professionals, along with the child's parents and often others with relevant expertise, the IEP states learning goals for the student. It also maps out services, modifications or accommodations that support the student in the school environment. IEPs describe accommodations specific to the child, regardless of the type of disability — attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, speech or language impairment, specific learning disability or other.

When the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* was reauthorized in 2004, Congress included amendments to provide supports for students in extracurricular and afterschool programs. Some of these supports can be written into the IEP, which includes the following elements:²



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- **Vision statement** for what the student would like to accomplish, and what the IEP team would like to see the student accomplish.
- Present levels of **academic achievement** or performance.
- Annual **goals** that outline what a child can accomplish in a year and how the goals will be measured. These goals may be social, behavioral, academic, physical or otherwise related to education.
- **Services** the child qualifies for, including special education and related services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy or behavioral therapy.
- Program **modifications** stating what school personnel will do to support the child.
- Individual **accommodations** (specific support tools or strategies) that will help the child meet the goals.
- Participation in state or district **assessments**, with an outline of any modifications for test administration.
- Information about when **services** will begin, how often they occur and where they will be provided. This part of the IEP may indicate whether the child will be in a general education or special education setting during the day, if and when the child receives resource services or is pulled out of the classroom

Ready to Dig Deeper?

See topic guide 2 in this series, “Legal Foundations of Inclusion: What You Need to Know,” for an overview of the federal legislation associated with IEPs and Section 504 plans.

See topic guide 9, “Addressing Individual Needs and Engaging All Learners,” for strategies front-line practitioners can use.

Both guides are available on the Department’s You for Youth website at <https://y4y.ed.gov>.

setting, and if and when the child attends special events (e.g., assemblies, music class) with peers.

IEPs can provide valuable information on modifications and accommodations that take students’ individual needs and abilities into account. Because they are written for an academic setting, however, some elements may not be appropriate in the 21st CCLC environment. Joining a student’s IEP team can help practitioners decide what accommodations would benefit the student within the program context.



Can 21st CCLC Staff Attend IEP Team Meetings?

Yes. *IDEA* allows family members to invite whomever they choose to an IEP meeting. Because 21st CCLC programs differ from academic settings, participating students often encounter challenges — and demonstrate strengths — that differ from those seen during the regular school day. Including out-of-school time professionals in IEP meetings creates opportunities to share information and collaborate on designing differentiated supports. Collaboration can help establish consistency among home, school and afterschool settings.

The Providence Afterschool Alliance (PASA) in Rhode Island, for example, works closely with the school district. PASA site coordinators sit in on many IEP meetings, where they make sure their afterschool program is written into the child's IEP. The district uses *IDEA* funds to help pay for the additional supports.

If a child in your program has an IEP, ask if you can join the IEP team. You can learn from others on the team and also contribute your own ideas and observations. Everyone wins — especially the student!

What Is a Section 504 Plan, and What Can It Tell You?

Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* is a civil rights law that protects people with disabilities from discrimination, including students with disabilities in schools and programs that receive federal funding. Students who have learning or attention disabilities but do not qualify for an IEP might have a Section 504 plan if their disability substantially limits their ability to learn and participate in the general education classroom. These plans are designed to remove barriers to learning and describe specific accommodations, supports or services provided in general education settings. They also describe services and changes to the learning environment that can help meet the needs of the child as adequately as other students. Each school district develops its own format for Section 504 plans. The following elements are generally included:³

- Specific accommodations, supports or services.
- Names of the professionals who will provide each service.
- The name of the person responsible for ensuring that the Section 504 plan is implemented.

If a child in your program has a Section 504 plan, ask the child's parents if you can join the 504 team.

Sometimes, you might not have access to a child's IEP or Section 504 plan, or you might notice that a child seems

to be struggling with certain activities. If that happens, it is still possible (and desirable) to accommodate individual needs. The goal is to ensure that all students have an opportunity to participate in and benefit from 21st CCLC programs.

IEPs and Section 504 Plans: Access and Confidentiality

The IEP or Section 504 plan can be valuable resources for translating support into the afterschool context. There are important things to know about how to gain access to these documents and protect confidentiality.

Access to IEPs or Section 504 Plans

Some 21st CCLC practitioners are school-day teachers or paraprofessionals who have access to IEP or Section 504 plan information and know what supports children with disabilities may need outside of school. However, gaining access to such information can be challenging for staff who are not school employees. Your program can consider creating a release form that parents and guardians can voluntarily sign to give your staff permission to contact the child's school and obtain information about the supports and services provided during the school day. The release form should explain that your program would use the information to better support the child. The form should also make it clear that the child's enrollment in your program will not be affected by the information obtained.



Student Confidentiality

All 21st CCLC practitioners who participate in IEP meetings or have access to IEPs and Section 504 plans should be vigilant about student confidentiality. *IDEA* provides “privacy protections for students who are receiving special education and related services.” These apply in addition to the requirements of the *Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA)*, which pertains to educational records and “grants parents certain rights of access to their children’s education records and restricts disclosure of information from those records without their consent.”⁴ In 2014, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and the Family Policy Compliance Office released the *IDEA and FERPA Confidentiality Provisions Crosswalk*. This document provides a comparison of legal provisions, definitions and confidentiality requirements in *IDEA* Part B, *IDEA* Part C and *FERPA*.⁵

IDEA Confidentiality Provisions

Part B, § 300.617: “The Secretary takes appropriate action, in accordance with section 444 of *GEPA* [the *General Education Provisions Act*], to ensure the protection of confidentiality of any personally identifiable data, information, and records collected or maintained by the Secretary and by SEAs [state education agencies] and LEAs [local education agencies] pursuant to Part B of the Act [*IDEA*], and consistent with §§ 301.611 through 300.627.”

For a comparison of the confidentiality provisions in *IDEA* Parts B and C and the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)*, see pages 8-11 in *IDEA and FERPA Confidentiality Provisions*, presented by the U.S. Department of Education, June 2014, at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/ptac/pdf/idea-ferpa.pdf>.

Supporting IEP Transition Planning and Services

When students with IEPs become teenagers, their IEPs will include a focus on life beyond high school. This begins at age 14 with *transition planning*. At age 16, the IEP maps out *transition services* to help a “student move from school to adult life.”⁶

Transition services are a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability. Their purpose is to improve the child’s academic and functional achievement to facilitate his or her movement from school to postschool activities, such as higher education, job training and employment, independent living and community participation. Transition services are based on the individual child’s needs and take into account his or her strengths, preferences and interests.⁷

Preparation for the transition to adult life can begin in early childhood. For example, program planning at the 21st CCLC kindergarten program at Eagle View Elementary in Utah includes a framework for achieving a long-term goal of college and career. The entire school participates in No Excuse University, a nationwide program founded on the principle that all students, including those with disabilities, can learn and prepare for college. Each grade level adopts a college mascot and



discusses education beyond high school. Postsecondary education goals are reinforced in the classrooms and hallways, where reminders of student successes are evident. Awards for Eagle View students are organized like college-level degrees (e.g., associate’s, bachelor’s, master’s and doctorate). For all students, and especially for those with disabilities, it is never too soon to start looking ahead toward the transition to life beyond K–12 schooling.

Story From the Field

Transition and Thinking About the Future

Dr. Martha Mock, Director, Institute for Innovative Transition and Associate Professor, Warner School of Education, University of Rochester

Talking with students about “what they will do when they grow up” is essential for all students at all levels. Today’s five-year-olds will do jobs that have not yet been imagined. That’s why it’s so important for 21st CCLC programs to create environments where all students have opportunities to solve problems, act independently, think creatively, practice compassion and build the skills they need to navigate an ever-changing world. Your 21st CCLC program can be an excellent place for students with disabilities, in particular, to practice skills related to independence, self-direction and self-advocacy. Your program can also play an important role in helping middle and high school students with disabilities envision a productive and fulfilling future. Thoughtfully planned program activities can help them imagine and explore the many possibilities, including vocational education, college and employment in the community.

Working With IEPs and Section 504 Plans, and Supporting IEP Transition Plans and Services

Action Planning Checklist for 21st CCLC Programs (With Selected Resources)

Work With IEPs and Section 504 Plans

- **Ask families if someone from your program can join the IEP or Section 504 plan team.**
- **Seek permission from the student’s family** to obtain a copy of the IEP or Section 504 plan and to communicate with the student’s teachers, therapists and support staff.
- **Learn about the child’s communication system** (assistive technology, sign language, etc.); if the child uses a picture support system such as PECS, ask for copies of existing communications materials so that you can use a system that is already familiar to the child.
- **Store student information and education records securely, and acquaint all staff with confidentiality provisions.** Access the U.S. Department of Education’s *IDEA and FERPA Confidentiality Provisions* to see a crosswalk of legal provisions, definitions and confidentiality requirements in *IDEA* Part B, *IDEA* Part C and *FERPA*: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/ptac/pdf/idea-ferpa.pdf>
- **Establish specific phrases program staff can use when someone asks about confidential information.** For example, a parent might ask, “Does that student have a disability?” Staff might respond like this: “We keep all students’ private information in strict confidence. If you have a question or concern about a student, you can talk to our program director.”

Support Transition Planning and Services for Middle and High School Students

- **Become familiar with resources on helping students with disabilities transition from high school to adult life.** Here are some examples:
 - The Pacer Center: Champions for Children with Disabilities
<http://www.pacer.org/transition/>
 - The Institute for Innovative Transition
<http://www.nytransition.org/>
 - Youth Transition Experiences Webinar, featuring I am Norm Youth Leaders
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mUJ956ysJs>
 - The National Youth Transitions Initiative
http://www.hscfoundation.org/National_Youth_Transitions_Initiative
 - Wrightslaw: “IDEA 2004: Transition Services for Education, Work, Independent Living”
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/idea/art/defs.transition.htm#sthash.7UemXoaP.dpuf>



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Interested in checklists on other inclusion topics? All *Lessons From the Field* topical guides on inclusion contain checklists like this one. The guides are available at <https://y4y.ed.gov>.

Notes

¹ Center for Parent Information and Resources, *The Short-and-Sweet IEP Overview* (Newark, NJ: Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2013), <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/iep-overview>.

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, *A Guide to the Individualized Education Program* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2000), <http://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/iepguide.pdf>.

³ K. Stanberry, *Understanding Section 504 plans* (Understood, 2014), <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/504-plan/understanding-504-plans>.

⁴ National Forum on Education Statistics, *Forum Guide to Protecting the Privacy of Student Information: State and Local Agencies*, NCES 2004-330 (Washington, DC: National Forum on Education Statistics, 2004), 10, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2004/2004330.pdf>.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, *IDEA and FERPA Confidentiality Provisions* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2014), <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/ptac/pdf/idea-ferpa.pdf>.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, *A Guide to the Individualized Education Program* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2000), <http://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/iepguide.pdf>.

⁷ Center for Parent Information and Resources, *Transition Planning* (Newark, NJ: Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2010), <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/iep-transition>.

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